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JOSEPH IN JEOPARDY





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JOSEPH IN JEOPARDY

BY

FRANK DANBY pseud

AUTHOR OF "THE HEART OF A CHILD"
AND "PIGS IN CLOVER"

c J. Frankau

New York
THE MACMILLAN COMPANY
1912

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[illegible] (English)

NEVER a careworn wife but shows,
If a joy suffuse her,
Something beautiful to those
Patient to peruse her.
Some one charm the world unknows
Precious to a muser,
Haply what, ere years were foes,
Moved her mate to choose her.

JOSEPH IN JEOPARDY

by uncles whose frockcoats and buttonholes were as prominent as their aldermanic paunches.

It was all to do honour to that great man, Amos Juxton, who this day was giving his only daughter in marriage to young Dennis Passiful, the parson's adopted son, the orphaned youngster for whom he, and so many of the worshippers at St. Chrysostom, had put their hands into their pockets nearly two-and-twenty years ago.

Amos Juxton was easily the richest man in the district. He was also the most important; not because he had the largest, grandest, most extensive and expensive of the bloated overgrown villas that have procured for Fitzjohn's Avenue the designation of the "Fifth Avenue" of North West London; not because he owned more motors, had a bigger garden, and a more elaborate establishment than any other London plutocrat who was content outside Mayfair; but because he was a man with a striking personality, of whom any neighbourhood might well be proud; a self-made man, whose business was philanthropy and whose philanthropy was business.

Amos Juxton was the author of the "Away With Housekeeping" advertisements, "No More Use For Kitchen Stoves," "The Emancipation of Women At Last," and other legends equally intoxicating to the feminine middle-class mind. These legends are familiar to us all; their great author is hardly less well known. Every hoarding that proclaims the advantages of "Juxton's Limited" exhibits the features of its founder. Through full pages, heavily leaded, in all the great dailies, through reiterated pictorial insistence in all the Illustrated Weeklies, through Sky Signs, Transparencies and Floating Balloons, we have learnt to appreciate the universal blessings conferred by "Juxton's Limited." "Pure Cooked Food Hot and Hot. Three Daily Meals For Small Annual Subscription."

But it is as superfluous now to dwell on what Juxton's has

done for women, as it would be to point out the value of the railway system. In essentials, of course, it is but the principle of the New Journalism applied to gastronomy. Breakfast, lunch, and dinner, tea, tiffin, and supper, hot and strong and frequent, as many editions, in fact, per day as one liked to pay for, are delivered at the front door with the punctuality of the post. The viands, varied and appetising, arrive in the well-known Juxton Brown Ware. Personal tastes are consulted. Some, as it were, are supplied with the gastronomic equivalent of "The Times"; substantial and expensive, with dessert extra, like the Book Club. Others content themselves with "Daily Mail" or "Express" meals, spicy, but only sufficient for the appetite, without unnecessary garnish, or 'literary leader writing' as Amos Juxton's circulars put it.

For Amos is really a man of imagination. He has not only made the nebulous schemes of a Communal Kitchen, long floating in the air, into a practical factor of daily life, but has so enlarged and extended its scope, that now the Communal kitchens, to quote again from his advertisements, include a complete Communal establishment. For the Agency that Amos has brought into being will clean the house, engage servants or relieve one from the necessity of keeping any; wet-nurse or bottle-feed the babies, wheel them out in perambulators or trot them in the Park, educate and clothe them. It was really Amos Juxton who made Female Suffrage practicable. It is even now one of his proudest boasts that all the leaders of the movement were among the first customers of "Juxton's."

The marriage of the only daughter of a man so distinguished was naturally an event of almost national importance. And it was not surprising, therefore, to find the air vibrating with expectancy, the crowd constantly increasing, eager heads craning, and eyes straining to see the entry into the church of the bride leaning on her father's arm.

Amos would be sure to make his entry effective. Meanwhile the bells continued to peal, and in the pews one heard the buzzing talk concentre on bride and bridegroom. The bridegroom was already in evidence, very nervous apparently, as is the way with bridegrooms, and paler than his habit. He was walking about restlessly, now conversing with young Ted Juxton, his brother-in-law that was to be, the only son of the great man; now coming forward to welcome one or the other of his friends; finally settling down in the front pew beside the two old maids, dressed alike in grey satin, sisters of the Vicar, the Misses Paighton. It was they who had mothered his orphaned babyhood, and shepherded all his youth.

Dennis Passiful, the bridegroom of the day, was the son of their love, the child of their many prayers. He knew what he owed them, but no sense of obligation weighed upon him. If they loved him, he loved them little less, matching their simplicity with his own.

And now at a word from Agatha, in sight of those gaily-dressed and curious wedding-guests, they all three knelt down, hiding their faces. In a few minutes Dennis was to meet his bride; he was nervous and excited, and the two old maids in deep sympathy with him. To spend those few intervening minutes in prayer seemed natural and fitting, and Ursula as well as Agatha, as he knelt between them, put up an earnest supplication for his happiness. But if he prayed, it was not for his own happiness, or Mabel's, only for strength to meet whatever came. Since the morning some misgivings had shaken him.

A little thrill ran through the church at the sight of those three on their knees. Who was it that had said this was only a marriage of convenience, that Amos Juxton's money was needed in Dennis Passiful's business? Whoever said it might well feel ashamed. Not so do bridegrooms act when they are consummating a business transaction, nor

are their faces as the face of young Passiful when he rose from his knees, nor have their eyes the same light in them.

This young bridegroom was worthy to be looked at, and when the old maids moved tremulously to let him pass, every girl, wife, and widow took advantage of the opportunity. In stature something over six feet, perfectly proportioned, as those who had so often seen him in flannels at the Cricket Club could testify, his square chin showed strength, his ears lay flat to his well poised head, the close-cut hair that no amount of brushing could deprive of its tendency to curl, was golden above his broad brow, above the expectant eyes. He was barely four-and-twenty, little more than a boy in years, and really only a boy at heart, in his ignorance of the world, and unsophisticated way of thought.

The bells pealed out more loudly and joyously, heralding the tardy arrival of the bride. The Reverend Stewart Paighton, surpliced, with his attendant curate, took their places at the altar rail. Young Ted Juxton, a natural bungler, but one of good intention, first told Dennis he must go down the aisle to meet Mabel, and then hurriedly recalled his instructions and said he must wait where he was. The bells ceased, and the solemn notes of the organ seemed a fitting accompaniment for Amos Juxton, as he came through the church door, with his daughter on his arm.

Mabel was veiled in Brussels lace, her downcast head crowned in orange blossoms. Amos, short and immensely stout, his benignant expression accentuated by his double chin, was almost a procession in himself. He strutted up the aisle with full knowledge of the impression he was producing — he almost forgot Mabel, who could scarcely keep up with him. He held his head well up, thinking the organ accompaniment to his progress eminently fitting; remembering his banking account and all his benefactions to humanity. His fair scant hair was parted in the middle, and

the blue eyes beamed with portly self-satisfaction. Poor Mabel, bewildered at her position, glad of her veil, uncertain of her conduct, was a mere appendage to his consequence. In truth she did not look the bride for the magnificent specimen of young English manhood awaiting her at the altar.

Even in her wedding-dress, and through the filmy lace that softened and enshrouded her, one could see that she was lean, and her back a little rounded; that her face and hair matched in a dead level of dun; that she had neither style, nor presence, nor beauty; that she looked every day of her six-and-twenty years, and had no grace nor compensating charm. But she was Amos Juxton's only daughter, and Amos Juxton was worth a million if he was worth a penny. No one who saw him walk up the aisle could doubt it. It was said in the pews, but it also exuded from his complacent countenance. No man who had made less than a million could wear such a look.

The bells were silent and the deep notes of the organ welcomed Amos Juxton fittingly as he took his stand beside his daughter at the altar. On the other side his son gave the bridegroom the support of his presence. Many people commented on the strangeness of young Ted being best man, for young Ted was married. But then Amos Juxton was a law in himself, and this was not the moment to quarrel with his decrees.

The Reverend Stewart Paighton began the Service. Dennis Passiful was his adopted son. Orphaned and without means, the Vicar had laboured to collect a fund for his education, completing the good work by giving him a home. There was hardly a man in that congregation who had failed to respond to an appeal for which each had seen the occasion. They had all been repaid, not only in money, but in satisfaction; this marriage was the coping stone to their effort.

"Dearly beloved, we are gathered together here in the
"sight of God and in the face of this congregation to join
"together this Man and this Woman in holy Matri-
"mony . . ."

Dennis's father and mother had died within a week of each other of diphtheria; their lovely little romance had its quick climax. For Dennis, then an infant, there had been no inheritance but the wisdom of the love in which he had been conceived. And into this he had not yet come, although it was his own wedding day.

The Vicar's low, impressive voice went on intoning:

"And therefore is not by any to be enterprised, nor taken
"in hand, unadvisedly, lightly, or wantonly, to satisfy
"men's carnal lusts and appetites. . . ."

Dennis was ready with his responses, not lightly, but solemnly, as his adopted father had behoved him that morning, and with an ever increasing fear of the responsibilities he was undertaking.

The Vicar was celibate, but he had a deep sense of what was required of a married man. He was not given to exhortation in private life, but the talk he had had with Dennis that morning was in the nature of an exhortation, and as Dennis said his responses he was full of what had been so gravely said to him.

"Wilt thou love her, comfort her, honour, and keep her,
"in sickness and in health; and, forsaking all other, keep
"thee only unto her, so long as ye both shall live?"

He almost wished that Mr. Paighton had not left it until his wedding morning; this solemn, earnest talk. He could not shake off the impression it had made upon him, the institution of marriage seemed like an enveloping cloud in which the bride was a little lost, her personality a little shrunk.

"With this Ring I thee wed, with my body I thee
"worship, and with all my worldly goods I thee endow;
"In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the
"Holy Ghost."

The organ crashed out its "Amen."

He would cherish her; he never before had possessed anything entirely of his own. Adopted relations were, after all, not the same as real ones. Yet her father had cared for her less, and less well than the family at the Vicarage had cared for him. Now it was his turn to do something for somebody, to prove his active Christianity. Mabel had been unhappy, lonely, a little neglected. He would make up to her for it all; he was sure he could make her happy.

"Let us Pray. O Eternal God, Creator and Preserver
"of all mankind, Giver of all spiritual grace, the Author
"of everlasting life; Send thy blessing upon these thy
"servants, this man and this woman, whom we bless in thy
"Name; that, as Isaac and Rebecca lived faithfully to-
"gether, so these persons may surely perform and keep the
"vow and covenant betwixt them made, (whereof this Ring
"given and received is a token and pledge) and may ever
"remain in perfect love and peace together, and live accord-
"ing to thy laws, through Jesus Christ our Lord."

It was all over. They were man and wife. It was rather bewildering, but the melody of the Wedding March as it swelled full-toned from the organ, made it exhilarating; so did the congratulations of the friends who went with them into the vestry to sign the marriage register. Amos Juxton was not only a procession, he was almost a crowd, filling the small room. Dennis was merely an individual beside him, notwithstanding his six feet and the width of his shoulders. But Amos weighed sixteen stone, at least so he affirmed; it might have been eighteen.

"Went off without a hitch," Amos said, not addressing anyone in particular, but the company in general. "No one can touch Juxton's at this sort of thing. Now you'll all come back to the house and see what sort of a spread we've got for you." He kissed his daughter, but that was rather perfunctory. His son and he were not on kissing terms. Ted was a fool, and in a general way Amos had little toleration for fools. But he nodded affably to him, for the occasion was one on which to eschew criticism.

"You'd best drive back with me," he said to him.

"And Fanny?" asked Ted, whose young wife was also in the vestry.

"Fanny! Oh, I didn't see Fanny!" Amos saw her now; she made a pretty little *moue* at him.

"Well, you ought to have seen me," she pouted, moving nearer to him, very conscious of her wedding finery; asking for admiration.

Amos was not averse from giving it. He thought Fanny a very pretty and attractive young woman. He had opposed Ted's marriage, now nearly a year old, but Fanny herself, although she had neither money nor position, had reconciled him to it. She paid him numberless little attentions, and deferred to his opinions. Amos seemed to preen all his feathers when Fanny was with him, as a peacock spreads his tail in the sun. Amos had no doubt Fanny admired him immensely. Fanny had the same impression about her father-in-law. They were to know each other better one day. Meanwhile it was almost a flirtation between them. Ted and Mabel, who were never quite at ease with their father, marvelled at the lightness with which Fanny treated him. Ted thought it was part of the general wonder of her. Mabel often wished that she had the same gift or knack of interesting and pleasing him. She would have loved her father had she found a chink in his complacency where love might lodge. Fanny played the spoilt

little daughter to him quite bewitchingly. Now she was pretending to sulk because he had not noticed her. And it was Fanny who hung on his arm when they left the vestry.

In the vestry also was the Honourable Cosmo Merritt, younger son of the well known Liberal peer, Lord Loughborough. Cosmo, whose allowance of three hundred a year was usually in arrears, and who supplemented it in various ways, had been Ted's coach in his ill-fated days at Cambridge. He knew how little his father could do for him, and indeed it was impossible to be for any length of time in Lord Loughborough's company without hearing him bewail his poverty, and the expensiveness of his family. Cosmo now was wooing journalism, literature, Fleet Street generally, and Amos spoke quite affably to him, although there had been a time when he thought his fees exorbitant, and the results inadequate.

"I daresay you'll be giving quite a fine account of this affair in your paper?" Amos said to Cosmo, over his shoulder, as he was signing the register. "Women like reading about weddings." Amos was a great believer in a fair and liberal press. "You're coming on to the house, I hope," he said. "We'll show you how we do things."

"I've no doubt the public interest will be enormous," answered Cosmo with seriousness. He was a critic and not a reporter, but the great advertiser knew of only one use for newspaper men.

Amos had a moment's pause over that seriousness; he looked to see if the face agreed with the words. But the face of Cosmo Merritt was quite expressionless, and Amos went on:

"There's room for you in the carriage. We'd best be going before we get a crowd in front of us. Come along, Ted, hurry up." For Ted was now somewhat laboriously adding his signature below his father's. "See you later,

Paighton, I hope," he threw behind him to the clergyman, as he began to work his way out.

"Is it not customary to let the bride and bridegroom go first?" Cosmo queried blandly.

Cosmo Merritt, ever since he had been engaged to coach Ted for his "Little go" had been interested in Amos Juxton; and now the interest was deepening. If the world was Cosmo Merritt's oyster, he had begun to think it possible that Juxton's was the pearl; only the necessary mode of extraction was not yet quite clear. Ted had conceived for him a violent friendship, a species of hero-worship. He was conscious of having been extraordinarily tolerant of Ted. Ted's marriage had been a surprise to him, but Fanny, with whom his acquaintance was but recent, certainly added some zest to the position.

It was not without difficulty that the bride and bridegroom were permitted to precede Amos. But there is an etiquette about these things, and the Master of the Ceremonies, from Juxton's, was at the door of the Church to order it. First on the line was the carriage for the bride and bridegroom.

Dennis handed Mabel in, and followed quickly; the strains of the Wedding March, being played now for the second time, were still ringing in his ears, stunning him a little; that was all he heard as the carriage started. Mr. Amos Juxton, his son, and daughter-in-law were slow and impressive on the steps of the Church, and in their progress down the red carpet. Cosmo Merritt was rather puzzling to the Master of the Ceremonies, but with a wave of his hand, and the magic word "Press" Amos explained, and secured him. After the family, the guests could get away in any order they pleased; the reception in Fitzjohn's Avenue should not rightly begin until half an hour later. The procedure was very much the same as Juxton's pursued at funerals.

CHAPTER II

"WENT off without a hitch," said Amos to Cosmo Merritt when they were seated in the carriage. "You noticed that?"

"Did you expect any impediment would arise?" Cosmo enquired with apparent curiosity.

"Impediment? You mean confusion. Well, there often is confusion and muddlement at an affair of this sort. Ted, now, he mightn't have been able to find the ring; it would have been like Ted to have lost the ring. But we thought of that; my man handed it to him when he came into the Church, and saw that he put it in his right-hand waistcoat pocket."

"I shouldn't have forgotten it," said Ted sullenly. There were times when Ted Juxton resented his father's attitude towards him. Ever since his marriage to Fanny he had resented it. That was a year ago. When his father had at last consented to his marriage it was on the grounds that Fanny was 'clever' and would 'push him on.' If she *was* clever there seemed no reason why his father should always be rubbing it in that he was not. She was quite ready enough to see it for herself, Ted thought.

Fanny talked to Amos all the way from St. Chrysostom's to Fitzjohn's Hall, Fitzjohn's Avenue; 'prattled' would perhaps be a better word, although it was anything but artless. Fanny was quite young, and, being the daughter of a publican, prided herself, above everything, upon being 'lady-like.' She *was* lady-*like*, but it was only a distant resemblance. She was not tall, and Ted thought she had a springy walk; that was her own description, and he ac-

cepted it; but it was rather jerky than springy, owing to her spine being a little out of the perpendicular. It had to be admitted that Fanny's spine was not quite straight, and that in many particulars she resembled her spine. In the carriage she praised all Amos's arrangements, thought the screen of lilies charming, the mass of palms wonderfully effective, the bride's bouquet a marvel of bloom. She thanked him prettily for her own flowers, and said how well they matched her dress.

Fanny was in pink, *vieux rose*, she called it, and it made her complexion look yellowish. The corsage was trimmed with coral beads, and as she talked she played with a string of them that depended from her throat. At this period of her career she had no colour in her cheeks, they had the pallor that goes with red hair, the colour of her eyes was indefinite, her nose too wide at the root, and the mouth flat and ill tempered. But when Fanny smiled, and she smiled often, it was wonderful to see how her face lit up and altered; how gleams of malice or humour irradiated her eyes, and the prettiest possible set of teeth redeemed the flat mouth. To-day the red hair had evidently been carefully waved under the pink hat, overfeathered, very large, but not large enough to conceal that Fanny still wore the hall mark of Suburbia, a hair net! Fanny had developed very much since her marriage, and had begun to talk of "keeping up her position," but she still clung to her hair net, and her fondness for feathers and beads.

When Fanny had praised the decoration of the Church and Amos's arrangements, she began to discuss the guests and their clothes. And there it seemed nothing had completely pleased her. This one was gaudy, and the other one dowdy; pretty girls excited her dislike, popular ones her utmost contempt. Ted thought she was rather hard on Miss Jones, for instance, who dressed from Paris, and was by way of being the beauty of Hampstead. But Miss

Jones was Fanny's pet aversion — had not Ted once admired her fine skin, bright eyes and gaiety? Fanny had not finished half she had to say in dispraise of Miss Jones when the carriage arrived at Fitzjohn's Hall.

Here there were more palms and lilies, a band played on the landing, Amos called it the mezzanine floor, but no one knew why. On the right of the hall was the dining-room, where a buffet along the whole length of the floor — and every one who knew Amos knew that it was thirty-four feet — was set out with good things, the immense wedding-cake making an appropriate centre. On the left of the hall was the drawing-room, and there Mabel was already seated, under a canopy of flowers, with Dennis, still a little unlike himself, standing beside her. It had been arranged that so they should receive the wedding guests. But Amos soon relieved them of the trouble. He had taken up his position at the door, under the great white bell of wedding flowers with the orange for clapper, and there he welcomed old friends and new, acquaintances, strangers, and intimates.

"Very pleased to see you, I'm sure; very good of you to come. Have you had anything to take? Well, there's plenty there. Juxton's don't stint. If I expect three hundred people I don't order for two hundred and eighty, and take the odds of some of them not turning up. That's good enough for our customers, but it's not good enough for me. And some of you'll have brought your friends, I daresay. Quite right, Mrs. Gwatkin, glad to know your niece, any relation of yours is welcome. She'll like to see the house, I've no doubt. The presents are in the billiard room. Ted will show you where the billiard room is — that is if you can find him. He'll be near the champagne by now, that's his mark. And how do *you* do? . . . "

It was seldom Juxton's gave anything away except in the way of advertisement, or in the cause of philanthropy,

where advertisement followed as a matter of course. Amos made the most of this occasion.

By the time the guests had escaped to the spot where Mabel was awaiting their congratulations, his expansiveness had almost overwhelmed their capacity of expression. Still the women kissed Mabel, the men shook hands with Dennis, and said the same thing over and over again; the stream of it seemed unending.

"Don't you wish it was over?" the boy said to his bride.

"Oh, I'm sure it's very kind of them all. Some of them have come quite a long way. There are the Summers now, from Clapham, I do wish I could remember whether they sent the lamp shades or the tea cosy."

Mabel was really enjoying herself; she had never been the centre of attraction before. She tried to say the right thing to everybody.

Cosmo, with his expressionless face and his monocle, stood listening to Amos for some time; when the enjoyment palled he moved leisurely over to Fanny's side.

There had been passages, although passages is perhaps hardly the right word, between Ted's wife and Mabel's new husband. Fanny had shown that handsome young cricketer a certain amount of favour, and had betrayed a disposition to show him more. But Dennis was slow to appreciate it, he had in fact rather resented her amiability. Ever since he had been grown up, if anything a little before, he had known that women and girls had a 'beastly habit of making themselves cheap.' From Ted's fiancée the beastliness of it was accentuated, and he had been unable to conceal his feelings. Fanny would not easily forget what happened when she "tried to be nice" to Dennis Passiful. Fanny had always her own way of phrasing her own conduct.

"The bridegroom does not look exactly exhilarated. I trust your father-in-law has not failed in liberality?"

Cosmo began, with the easy insolence that characterized him. Fanny had perched herself on the edge of the fender seat, and in her attitude one could notice the little error in her spine, that her shoulders were certainly rounded, and that the expression of her face was unamiable.

Fanny, although she was supposed to be very fond of Mabel, whom she habitually spoke of either as "Poor Mabel" or "Poor old Mabel," was nevertheless jealous of seeing her surrounded, at hearing more comments on the white satin wedding dress, and the real Brussels veil, than on her own *vieux rose* costume. "Juxton's" kept this Brussels veil to lend to all their most expensive brides; Fanny knew it, but it failed to solace her.

"Mr. Juxton has been *very* liberal," she said in the detached and off-hand way she thought was good form. She was not quite definite as to what her behaviour should be towards Mr. Merritt. He had been Ted's tutor, which is of course a degrading occupation; and Fanny was not quite sure of the social position of a journalist. She did not yet know more than this about him, and, although she saw that he was already attracted by her, she had not by any means made up her mind as to what measure of encouragement she would give him. Notwithstanding that incident with Dennis, Fanny had no doubt she was practically irresistible, and she did not care to waste her favours. Her natural irritation at Miss Jones' toilette and at the attention Mabel was receiving, made her inclined to snub this imperturbable gentleman with the familiar manners. Her attitude amused Cosmo Merritt so much that he sat down on the fender stool beside her, and went on talking.

"Tell me something about the bride and bridegroom," he persisted, "there is an interesting incongruity of age and type. Who is he?"

"His father was an artist," Fanny answered in an off-hand manner.

"So I should have suspected."

Cosmo surveyed Dennis's proportions, from the distance, with admiration not unmixed with envy. He himself was less than five feet ten, and the charm of his pallor was somewhat diminished by his tendency to *embonpoint.*

"Praxiteles himself could have fashioned nothing better. I want to know more about the bridegroom's father. Did he work only in human clay, did the gods of Hampstead bow down and worship? Where did the Vicar come in? I understood Ted to say that the bridegroom was his adopted son."

Fanny had never heard of Praxiteles. And she did not like too much consequence being attributed to Mabel's husband.

"They lived in quite a small way," she said hastily.

"Splendid," he answered inconsequently. He began to think Fanny might prove as amusing as her father-in-law. Had not the Vicar come up to them at the moment there is no saying how Fanny would have decided to treat Cosmo Merritt. But the Vicar came into the drawing-room at this moment, and straight to where they were sitting.

"I thought I saw you in Church," he said to Cosmo, holding out a cordial hand, "but I was not sure. How is your Mother, your dear Mother? I know I have been remiss in my enquiries. And Mervyn, tell me about Mervyn, and Van. Van is still at Denham, I suppose?"

Quite a number of questions and intimate answers followed, Fanny thus becoming aware of several things that altered her mental attitude towards her companion.

Before the Vicar moved off again, claimed by some exuberant parishioner, Fanny, for instance, knew that Cosmo Merritt's mother was Lady Loughborough, and that she had been injured in a hunting accident. Fanny's acquaintance with the Peerage was limited, and all she knew of

hunting was through skipped pages of Mrs. Kennard's novels. She looked at Cosmo Merritt now with new eyes, the eyes she kept for Amos, and for other men she wished to captivate.

"You want to know all about the bride and bridegroom," she said, smiling at him, "I was just going to tell you when Mr. Paighton interrupted us. Mabel is . . . well, just Mabel. I don't suppose you want to know anything more about her? Dennis is a sort of parish orphan. Nobody knows anything about his people, where they came from, or why they came here. The Vicar called upon them when they first came into their little house, and he heard that Mr. Passiful painted pictures, and wanted to give drawing lessons. Somebody said his wife had been his pupil, and that he had run away with her, and changed his name. But nobody knew for certain, because the very day after the Vicar called, Mr. Passiful was taken ill; he died within the week. He asked Mr. Paighton to look after his wife and child."

Fanny had the story quite pat, it was common property in Hampstead.

"But it was diphtheria he had, and it was before the days of antitoxin, and the wife died too. There was no one left but the baby; no papers, no letters, nor anything. Mr. Paighton advertised, but nothing happened. Of course in the ordinary way the baby might have been sent to the Workhouse." Fanny liked saying that, it belittled Mabel's marriage, and made the fuss they were all making about her ridiculous, "but the Vicar had taken an extraordinary fancy to the people, and wouldn't hear of it. He made a house to house collection; and then he preached a charity sermon." She paused for breath.

"Inasmuch as ye do it unto the least of these?" queried Cosmo, with a whimsical smile; he had an attractive smile, and since Fanny had heard who he was she found his eyes

were rather nice, and she did not mind the wrinkles round them. He had beautiful white hands; Ted's hands were horribly rough and coarse. His attention to her this afternoon was really a feather in her cap.

"There was nearly a thousand pounds collected," she finished, putting her coral beads into her mouth, and looking at him as if she were a child who had just finished saying her piece, and expected to be patted on the head and praised for her performance.

"A thousand pounds!" said Cosmo. "Mr. Paighton must indeed have been very eloquent. And then what happened? Did a millionaire relative turn up?"

He seemed to be regarding her with admiration. She had always been told she had a lively manner. Fanny felt that she was really becoming quite attracted by the Hon. Cosmo Merritt. She wondered if he would be Lord Loughborough when his father died — and how old his father was. It was all so exciting she nearly lost her self-possession, but remembered in time that she must continue to be ladylike.

"Go on telling me about it I like the way you relate the story, it makes me suspect you have literary talent. You must be very careful not to use it."

"Not use it?" Fanny smiled in surprise.

Cosmo was beginning to think she was quite pretty. Of course she was an underbred little thing, but her teeth and hair and spiteful tongue redeemed her. The wooing of women being an art upon which he prided himself, Fanny became every instant more sure of the effect she was producing.

"Certainly you must not use it. Women who write, or even read seriously, are mere contortionists, strained and twisted out of their natural and becoming ignorance. You are much too pretty to pose for being intelligent, if it be true, look upon it as a misfortune, hide it as you would

any other deformity. Now tell me the end of the story."

"There isn't exactly an end, unless you call this wedding the end. The money was meant to keep and educate him. But the two old maids, the Vicar's sisters, had taken the baby into the Vicarage when the parents died, before the money was collected, and they couldn't make up their minds to part with him. I believe by that time they had come to believe he was *their* baby."

Fanny smiled again, and Cosmo looked at her appreciatively. That very nearly made her blush, she did not know why. "So it was decided it was all to go on his education, and the Vicarage was to be his home. He became quite the son of the house. He got into the Eleven at Harrow, and made a hundred at Lord's twice in the match."

"So he is *that* Passiful," exclaimed Cosmo. He remembered the match, and the sensational batting.

"He was to have gone on to Oxford. But until he was eighteen he had never heard he was brought up by charity. When the Vicar told him all about himself, he wouldn't go; he was mad to begin to make money, be self-supporting."

"Quixotic!"

"He wanted to be independent. My father-in-law offered him a position at Juxton's, but he preferred to go to a man named Abinger, who had a picture gallery in Bond Street. When Mr. Abinger died two years ago, he left the Bond Street Gallery and the good-will to Dennis. But he had not enough money to run the business. That's how he and Mabel came together," she finished, maliciously.

Mrs. Ted was sometimes untruthful by accident, and sometimes by design. In this instance one may give her the benefit of the doubt.

"He doesn't look like a young fellow who would marry for money," Cosmo said reflectively. He had no illusions about Fanny, and only credited her story carelessly. But

there seemed no obvious motive for this marriage except the one she had given him. Looking at the bride again, Cosmo saw that she was flat chested, and certainly a year or two older than her husband; she did not seem to have any features at all, so indeterminate were they under her wreath of orange blossoms.

Cosmo Merritt's interest in women was rather physicological than physiological. He made a study of morbid conditions. Mabel was only interesting through her accidental combination with this fine young man; and Cosmo's long connection with Cambridge made him interested always in young men. Fanny was perhaps better worth his immediate attention. For nearly half-an-hour, therefore, whilst the stream of people was increasing, the room, over-full already with flowers and ornaments, growing hotter, and the air more exhausted, Fanny listened to epigrams she hardly understood, and to enigmatic compliments that fed her ready vanity. She grew more and more pleased with her new conquest. And Cosmo, too, found himself less bored than might have been anticipated, for he recognized that Fanny's coldness of temperament, of which poor Ted had already dropped a hint, was combined with vanity so inordinate that under skilful handling it would take upon itself the hue of sensuality, or any other chameleon colour her egotism might think becoming.

Cosmo, in that half hour, definitely made up his mind that if Juxton's was his oyster, Fanny was the most succulent morsel of it he had yet encountered. But, then, for he was given to editing even his thoughts, and cultivated a certain preciosity of expression, he dropped the oyster metaphor. Fanny, for many reasons, was not edible, not for him, in any case. And he knew already, too, that her species was mammalian, and not oviparous. She purred when her fur was stroked the right way. But that the kitten in her would become a cat, would scratch and spit, and erect its

little furry tail, he had also no doubt. Cosmo knew, for instance, that poor Ted was all over scratches. Even now there was hardly a sound place in his sensitiveness, and he had been married but a year. Cosmo, personally, was not a man who would mind a scratch or two, and he knew how to make Fanny purr under his hand.

"I suppose I ought to go and see after Ted," she said presently, but remaining seated. Fanny was never quick in her movements. "He should be showing the presents, but he is much more likely to be in the dining-room sampling the champagne."

"You and your father-in-law always speak of Ted as if he were a drunkard. I wonder why? I have never seen him the worse for drink."

"He is so weak." She spoke of him contemptuously. "He could be led into any sort of mischief."

"Poor Ted!" said Cosmo under his breath, when he followed her into the dining-room.

Now indeed the house was filled to its utmost capacity. More and more people were constantly arriving, and none were leaving.

"There's Ted," he said, catching a glimpse of him in the distance. Ted was coming out of the dining-room, and it was true that his face was flushed, and he had a glass of champagne in his hand. Fanny's expression was one of distaste, she had no smile of welcome for him.

"I was coming to look for you," he began, perhaps a little unsteadily, ignoring her companion, and the indifferent people about them. "The buffet, and all in there reminded me of this time last year." He did lower his voice a little, but it was obvious he had only one objective; to say something to Fanny. If he had been drinking he was certainly not drunk.

"This time last year, Fan, it was we who were just off. And I brought you out a glass of champagne as you came

down the stairs in your travelling things . . . don't you remember?"

He recollected the smile she had given him then, and how he had felt about her. Poor fellow! He had fallen headlong in love with her when yet but a boy, and he was still in the abyss. But everything had gone wrong between them, they seemed to have begun to quarrel before their honeymoon was over; he knew he was hasty and oversensitive, not good enough for her. It had come to him in the dining-room that now was the moment to admit his faults, to remind her of their days of happiness. He had a desperate, overmastering desire to make one more attempt to get things right between them.

"You remember how jolly we were when we went off together?" His eyes interrogated her, they were unhappy eyes, soft and seeking, like a dog's, incongruous in his coarse face. Fanny made a gesture of repulsion, rejecting the proffered glass. She threw a little appealing look to Cosmo as if to draw his attention to Ted's unsteadiness, and the awkwardness of his interruption.

"I don't particularly want to remember it," she said coldly. "What have you been doing with yourself, your face is quite red?" If her smile was pretty her laugh was only malicious. "Your hair is all rough, as if the maids had been touzling it."

He could not bear ridicule, and she had often been able to check scene or explanation in some such way as this. But for the moment his absorption in what he had to say overmastered the sensitiveness and the incoherence that was part of him and of his love. He did lower his voice, but that was all the heed he paid to her remonstrance. She tried to get away from him, to pass into the room, but he held her arm. Over and over again her coldness had baffled and hurt him, but now he was aflame with reminiscence. He took no heed of Cosmo, who, after all, was his friend,

and knew something of his unhappiness; nor of the guests who were all about them.

"Let's begin all over again, Fan. I don't care for you a bit less than I did this time last year when we were going off, and I was so mad about you. I know I'm bad tempered, but Fan . . ."

She would not listen to him, wanted to shake him off. "You looked so wonderful! You're just as pretty as you were then, prettier if anything."

"I wish you wouldn't make yourself so ridiculous." Her voice was low, too, but vibrant with annoyance. She divined a smile on Cosmo's inexpressive face, and the curiosity of the people about them.

"Touch the glass with your lips, that's what you did then, and I drank it off."

The easiest, the only way to rid herself of him seemed to be to do what he asked, but she could not do it graciously. She put her lips to the glass, making a wry face over it. But he did not release her arm as he gulped down the rest.

"Here's luck to us both, and no more trouble. Let me have a kiss, no one is noticing. We're going to begin all over again." But this was too much, her pallor took on a flush, it came underneath the skin in patches, and was unbecoming.

"Not if you make a fool of yourself now before everybody. Go away, go and fetch Mabel, it's time she came to cut the cake." There was neither tenderness nor responsiveness in her, nothing but physical repugnance and the fear lest she should be made to look ridiculous.

"Don't snub me, for God's sake don't snub me again."

"Leave go my arm, don't make a fool of yourself."

"You'll give me another chance. Darling!"

"Everybody is looking at us."

"No, they're not, they're only thinking of themselves." She turned away from him, shrugging her shoulders.

"Don't be hard, Fan, you used not to be so hard upon me then," he urged.

"Oh, wait until we get home." She flung him a half promise — anything to rid herself of the grasp on her arm, his hot breath and pleading eyes. And now people came between them: Mabel, preceded by her father and followed by Dennis, was leaving the drawing-room.

"We must see her cut the cake," she said hastily. "Father is going to make a speech."

There was no time for more. Already Amos had taken up his position at the buffet, Mabel was fumbling with the knife which the man from Juxton's had handed her ceremoniously.

"Ladies and Gentlemen: —"

The voice commanded attention, silencing Ted, who fell back as Fanny pressed forward. There were cross-currents, some wanted to hear the speech and pushed their way to the front; some wanted to avoid it and tried to escape. In the confusion Fanny and Ted were safely separated, Cosmo instinctively helping the manœuvres. Out of breath they leaned against the wall, hearing, above the chink of the glasses and the buzz of the voices, Amos delivering himself to his guests:

"Ladies and Gentlemen, I'm glad to see you all here . ." He dwelt on the pleasures of hospitality, then had glasses primed, and came to the point of his discourse. "There's something I want to tell you, a coincidence that I think you'll agree with me is worth chronicling. You've not only been celebrating the wedding of my daughter, but the silver-wedding day of me and my business! Five-and-twenty years ago I began to see what it was you all of you wanted. . . ."

Amos had been in a subordinate position at Messrs. Bonner & Lands' in those days. He was not at all ashamed of it. It was then the great idea struck him that it was not

only catering for entertainments people needed, they wanted to be relieved of the burden of servants and household cares.

They had heard all this and much self-glorification at Ted's wedding, they had to listen to it again now.

"When I became a widower, it was Juxton's stepped in to take care of my house. It was Juxton's, too, that brought up both my children!"

Cosmo's eyes went from unattractive Mabel, slipping away to change into her traveling dress, to unhappy Ted, flushed and awkward; and he wondered at the pride in Amos's voice. Then his eyes met Fanny's, and they seemed to read each other's thoughts; her smile was ready for him.

Amos spoke for nearly twenty minutes. The wedding guests, eating and drinking, paid him a perfunctory but sufficient attention. Before Mabel came downstairs again Mr. Paighton had sought out Dennis, and his sisters were finding the opportunity for a tearful embrace.

"God bless, you, my dear, dear boy."

"We cannot bear to part with you, the Vicarage will not be home without you. But Mabel is so good."

Mr. Paighton waited until his sisters had done. Then he too had his last word.

"My boy, I hope this is for your happiness?"

There was wistfulness in his voice. He, too, had had no misgivings until to-day. Mabel was a little older than Dennis, but she had always been affectionate and gentle, punctual in her Church attendances. His sisters liked her. He had no grounds for the doubt that suddenly assailed him. He had always hoped for an early marriage for Dennis.

The Vicar of St. Chrysostom deemed himself a man of the world, he was conscious of tolerance, and wide sympathies. He knew there were temptations of the flesh, and had always prayed that Dennis might be saved from them. There was one whole summer in which he had been full of anxiety. Dennis had played a great deal of cricket,

spending a week here, and a week there, with teams from his Club and others. Mr. Paighton had surmised, or heard, of loose talk, and become indefinitely uneasy. Not with the fear that Dennis had fallen, or would fall. Dennis remained pure in heart, or so the Vicar thought and hoped. But his ideals seemed to be getting a little blurred, and his speech freer. His mind appeared attuned to adventure, and he spoke lightly about matters that merited different treatment. It occurred to the Vicar that when cricket teams arrived at country places, barmaids, chambermaids and shop girls took too active an interest in them. Dennis talked of moonlight meetings, and laughed a little at the difficulties there had been to keep the men together after play.

When this marriage was suggested it seemed God's answer to prayers.

"It will be for your happiness, I am sure."

Dennis was sure of it, too, he said.

Then Mabel came downstairs in a flutter of nervousness, or fear lest something had been forgotten, or some one neglected. There was a rustle of dresses in the crowded hall. Rice and slippers were thrown, and Amos's voice was heard again:

"Don't spare the rice, there's plenty of it in the house, there's confetti, too, or I'll know the reason why. Have at them . . ."

Dennis was conscious of Ted's rough cordial handshake, and his "Good luck to you, old fellow."

Now Mabel was by his side in the brown travelling dress. He had a strange new sense of proprietorship in her.

The motor was waiting for them. He handed Mabel in, then followed quickly. He was anxious to get away, glad it was all over, feeling unwontedly irritable, or impatient, and with a sense of unreality about him.

The chauffeur sounded his horn, there was a last chorus of "Good-byes," a last shower of rice rattled against the back of the car. They were off.

CHAPTER III

"Oh, I do believe I've forgotten my handbag. Do stop him, Dennis, we must go back."

"It's all right, here it is, I've got it."

"So you have, I was in such a fright. It gave me quite a turn. I didn't know what I should have done without it. Wasn't it foolish of me? I wish you'd see if any of the rice has stuck in my dress. I wish there was a brush in this car. Some of the cars have nice little fittings, mirrors and brushes; you've seen them, haven't you? Father took quite a lot of trouble about them."

"You can shake yourself out when you get to the station; it will be dusk by then, and no one will notice."

"But the stations are all so brilliantly lit up, it would be so dreadful if people knew we were a newly married couple!"

It was on the tip of Dennis's tongue to ask why. He had a sort of idea he would like the people at the station to know he was a newly married man, to look at him, and see a difference. But Mabel was obviously nervous, and a little overwrought; one could not expect logic from her under the circumstances.

It seemed to Dennis already that there was a sense of flatness and sameness about the whole adventure, if indeed being married and going away on your honeymoon were an adventure at all, and not an ordinary, commonplace, everyday affair. Just at the moment it seemed less exciting than a cricket tour. Up to now a cricket tour had been the most exhilarating experience of Dennis's uneventful life. It was undertaken in company with such

a lot of cheery young fellows, bent on enjoyment, full of spirits, eminently companionable. He almost caught himself wishing that this was the beginning of a cricket week, and not of a honeymoon. Remorsefully he took Mabel's hand in his:

"It's going to very jolly, isn't it?" he said.

"I *do* think everything went off well," Mabel answered.

If it had gone off well, nevertheless the effect was something like that of a damp squib.

"Did you like Fanny's dress? It came from Peter Robinson's, one of their newest Paris models. Father gave it to her, but he thought it dear, he hadn't meant it to cost so much. But of course it was very stylish. Oh dear, I do believe, after all, I forgot to say good-bye to Fanny! How vexing! I must write to her directly we get to Bournemouth. Do try and remind me, Fanny is so sensitive."

She had left her hand in his, she had even given it a gentle pressure. She had always thought Dennis Passiful such a nice young man. And he had been so kind and sympathetic when Roddy Ainsworth went to Australia. If Dennis, in the motor on the way to the station, was thinking of his cricket weeks Mabel was not without her own little regretful remembrance of how Roddy Ainsworth had once talked to her of going "on tour" with a first class concert company. Mabel was not imaginative, but she had thought what it would be like to go on tour with Roddy, to continue to practise his singing with him, and play his accompaniments. As she thought of this she pressed Dennis's hand more warmly, and answered his "Isn't this jolly?" with:

"I'm sure it's very nice to be going away together like this. I've never been to Bournemouth before. People say it's much prettier than Eastbourne." Mabel meant to make Dennis a good wife. She was loyalty itself, and now that they were married she would have no interest but his.

The retrospective glance at Roddy and the concert tour was over before it had begun.

Arrived at the station there was luggage to be seen to, the chauffeur to be tipped, a porter to be found, a carriage secured. Mabel counted her trunk and her dressing-bag, hat-box, and hold-all, several times, and she begged Dennis to make sure that it was the right train, and not on any account to lose sight of his portmanteau. She was very flustered, and, not content with Dennis's assurance, she interrogated a guard and was just about to repeat her enquiries to a pleasant-faced young navel cadet, whom she mistook for a railway porter, when the whistle sounded. Then she scrambled into the nearest carriage; it was not the one Dennis had secured, but "anything is better than missing the train," she exclaimed excitedly. Dennis had to rush to recover his hand luggage. When he lifted the bag to the rail above her head, her nervousness increased, and she begged him to be more careful. She was so afraid it would topple on to her head. She had heard of such cases, she said.

He had to find room for all the rugs and the wraps on the seats and on the floor, apologising to one amused fellow-traveller, who quickly realised the position. It took quite a long time before they settled down, opposite each other, in corner seats, and by then Margaret Lemon had noted that the bridegroom with the nervous bride was tall and attractive in his long travelling coat; that his voice was well-bred and properly modulated. Of course they ought to have had a carriage to themselves, but on the whole she was glad they had not.

"Will you have the rug over your knees?" Dennis asked Mabel. He meant to take good care of her. Roddy Ainsworth, who, before he had gone on the stage, had been a 'lob' bowler, and rather a friend of his, had behaved like a cad to poor Mabel; her father had always been ab-

sorbed in business, and Ted taken up with Fanny. Mabel had never had a good time. Dennis's young solicitude was all for her physical comfort; all his intentions were admirable.

"Yes, please, I should like the rug. I wish you could have got me a foot-warmer; my feet do get so cold travelling. But it was such a rush to get away, wasn't it?"

Then she began again to discuss the wedding details; he listened and responded, whilst their fellow-traveller from the opposite corner speculated curiously about them. The couple were so incongruous, so obviously newly married, and so incredibly ill-matched. Dennis would have attracted any woman's eye; his grace and his good looks were alike remarkable. Mabel had plaintive blue eyes, but the rest of her features were indistinctive. She managed to look dowdy in new clothes. She bought kid gloves because she had discovered that they wore better than suède, and square-toed boots with flat heels because "they were so much more useful." That she suffered from cold feet was as obvious as that her circulation was generally defective. One would be apt to suspect her of chilblains. The interested observer in the corner felt sure about it.

When they had talked about the wedding, the presents, and the guests for half an hour, and had begun to relapse into occasional silences, Margaret Lemon offered them illustrated papers. This was the first time Mabel was conscious that she and Dennis were not alone. She said hurriedly that "the carriage was so badly lighted it would be difficult to read," then to Dennis she added, that she thought she would "sleep a little." Mrs. Lemon opened one of the rejected papers, and Mabel settled herself for her nap.

Dennis gazed into the night that was coming so quickly; it was as if darkness was pursuing the train. He heard the rushing noise, the shriek and throb of the engine, presently

he lost himself in following them. The shriek and throb receded into the distance, touching his consciousness but dimly. Now he was back again with Mr. Paighton in the study, the earnest cadenced voice was going through the Marriage Service with him, explaining the Church's view of Marriage. First one, and then another phrase drifted back to him. But one came again and again, "*Forsaking all others.*"

He roused himself with a start, he did not want to sleep. What soft dark eyes the woman in the corner had; she was watching Mabel as she slept, watching her curiously. He too looked at Mabel. How tired she looked, quite worn out. Now his eyes met the curious ones, and he found himself flushing. "*Forsaking all others.*"

"Do you know what time we get to Boscombe?" their fellow passenger asked him. She had determined to make him speak to her. Why not? His bride slept, it was too dark to read, and they had at least another hour and a half before them. Margaret Lemon, who by a strange coincidence was with Dennis and Mabel in these first moments of their honeymoon, was at this time only at the beginning of her career. But already humanity was her happy hunting ground, and in the city of Prague wherefrom she rode, convention erects no fences.

"Do you know when we get to Boscombe?"

"I'm afraid I don't. In about another hour, I should think."

"A very slow train, isn't it?"

"Is it? It's always slow being in a train." Dennis spoke his thoughts aloud. He was quite ready to talk; it was absurd to be feeling bored, or unwontedly depressed.

"You don't care for travelling?"

"I haven't done much. Only cricket tours and that sort of thing." He was very ingenuous and flushed easily. That this was a distinctive journey he felt should be obvious to her.

"Not so pleasantly accompanied," she said easily.

"You guessed, then?"

"It wasn't very difficult."

"My wife," he said the words, new words to him, and the surprise made him repeat them. "My wife is awfully tired. It went on so many hours, the reception, I mean; you heard us talking about it?"

"Yes, I heard you talking about it. To-morrow I suppose I shall read about it in the papers. Next week your portraits will be in these," she pointed to the illustrated weeklies, of which already she had offered them the use.

"I say, you do travel with a pile of them, don't you?" She laughed at that.

"Many of my friends are writers, and I like to see what they have to say."

"It must be awfully jolly to be able to write."

"Not so very," Margaret answered drily. "Like all other professions it has its drawbacks. Do you know any literary people?" she asked him. She wanted to make him talk.

"I don't know any lady writers. I know one fellow who writes, Cosmo Merritt; he was at our wedding. A great pal of my brother-in-law."

"Cosmo! So you know Cosmo! Now you are not by any chance Ted Juxton. No, of course you're not, Ted has been married some time. You must be . . ."

"I am Dennis Passiful, Ted's brother-in-law. Do you know Ted, then?"

"No, only about him. But I am interested in you all, in Juxton's generally. Won't you come over and sit in this corner, opposite me? Then we can talk without waking your wife. Now, tell me, how came you to marry so young? You look a mere boy. Cosmo is one of my best friends, he and Lord Loughborough. You know Lord Loughborough, I suppose, Cosmo's father? They are

such a clever family. I saw him just before I left town this afternoon."

She did not blush, she had lost the habit of it before she was two-and-twenty, and had passed the ordeal of the Divorce Court. "Lord Loughborough does not get on very well with his children. Cosmo wants understanding. One has to explain father and son to each other. They are both unusual in a different way. Don't you think so? And now that Lady Diana is married, and his wife dying . . . Did you say you did know Lord Loughborough?"

"An unusually tall man, clean shaven, very bald, with a red face? He is interested in enamels, isn't he? I think I've seen him at Christie's."

"Christie's!" She was surprised at that. "What took you there? I can't connect cricketing with Christie's."

She liked to see his colour come and go, she liked his young ingenuousness. She was a woman of thirty, not beautiful, but eminently attractive, experienced in life, clever, rather unique in her class. She thought it would be easy to turn Dennis inside out, and afterwards she could discuss him with Cosmo, whom she really knew as intimately as she represented, better, perhaps, if the whole truth had been known. Cosmo had told her all about the Juxtons, for instance. In any case the lamps were so low it was impossible to read, and conversing with any casual stranger was better than not talking at all.

Margaret Lemon, a lady of ill-defined, but well understood, position, had no use for conventionality, and no regard at all for what this fine young man would think of her for plunging into conversation with him. All her life was on unconventional lines. The situation appealed to her sense of humour, and perhaps to her other senses. As a conversationalist she had often dealt with a wedding journey. As a woman she had only been present at one before this,

and then it was as a principal. But it was a good many years ago, and she liked reviving her emotions, analysing his.

"Tell me why you go to Christie's?" she repeated.

"I go on business. I'm a picture dealer."

"A picture dealer!" she exclaimed. She thought that no one in the world ever looked the part less. "But what can a boy like you know about pictures?"

That nettled him a little.

"I am supposed to be something of a judge," he said, a little offended.

"What School? Eighteenth Century English, of course."

"What makes you say that?"

She laughed.

"Never mind. But tell me more about yourself. How did it happen, how did it come about? Your wedding, I mean; you are so young and so . . ." but she did not finish this sentence. "You need not mind talking to me, I have an incurable interest in humanity; it is my only hobby."

She tried to draw him out about his marriage, but drew comparatively blank. Yet he, too, preferred to talk than to do nothing. He was not a good traveller; sitting still in a cramped space made him want to get up and kick. But with Dennis Passiful, talking was only surface work; he had not Margaret Lemon's communicativeness. His armoury against her inquisitiveness, a personal trait that she excused on literary grounds, was the armoury the Celt has always against the Semite. Margaret Lemon's Semiticism showed in her soft curious eyes, her dark untidy hair and familiar manner. There were a score of things she wanted to know, now that she had succeeded in identifying Dennis Passiful. Cosmo had told her much about the Juxtons, about Amos the ineffable, the wonderful; about young Ted, whom he had tried to coach at Cambridge, but who had proved

uncoachable; and about the great inheritance that would one day be his.

She had no interest at all in the Indian cricketers, an alternative topic Dennis offered her, and she really could not condescend to talk about pictures to him. She had an instinct he would admire Lawrence. If he would not fill in for her the sketch Cosmo had given of the Juxtons, then she wanted to know how he felt about his marriage. Margaret Lemon's indecorousness went right through her, like a stain; her life, her speech, the direction of her thoughts all showed it. But her indecorousness was concealed by what her men friends called her "charm"; in the same way as her untidy hair and careless dress covered a personal fastidiousness that was expressed in her slender, well kept hands. Dennis noticed the left one was ungloved, and that on the forefinger there was a fine old ring of emerald and Brazilian diamonds, but there was no wedding ring.

Dennis's simplicity, or obtuseness, baffled her curiosity. He may have had emotions, but she got no clue to them. She therefore told him a great deal about herself, mostly fictitious, and he found her quite interesting. He had never met any one like her, women of the Margaret Lemon type are not to be found in Hampstead Vicarages. But at the end of the journey she knew little more about him than she had at the beginning. He had been married that morning, and was now on his honeymoon journey, he dealt in pictures, more recently in other works of art. He played cricket in his leisure hours. He modestly left out the important item that he was a County player. Perhaps he concluded she must know it. He had a deep-rooted idea that the composition of county teams was a thing all people knew. His baffling candour forced her to her lures. Presently she started talking of sex problems. He had heard the phrase from Fanny, but was vague about its meanings. From that she drifted easily to marriage, and its limitations.

If he had irritated her by his reticence, she succeeded in making him uncomfortable by her want of it.

It was a mere incident, the meeting of these two, but one not to be without sequel.

"It seems rather a pity you have rushed so prematurely into marriage," was one of the things she said to him. "A few misogynists with a talent for friendship have made a success of it. But only when they have been united to women without temperament. For the rest it is only imprisonment; a life sentence. Iron barred doors, battlemented towers, but damp and circumscribed by the historic moat; at the best a tangled garden, walled in, broken glass along the top of the wall. Yet one gets out sometimes." There was a smile in her dark eyes, as if of the memory of escapades. "But not without hurt, never without hurt," she added, genuinely.

"Imprisonment," he repeated uncomfortably, perhaps a little stupidly; it was such an unaccountable thing for her to say.

"What else?" she went on, coolly, interested in the effect she was producing. "At the best a married man is a prisoner of honour, on *parole* as it were. I suppose, though, it never struck you this way. You will live in the same house, or flat, with your fellow prisoner, the servants as warders, watchful, and occasionally insolent; tied down to specific times for meals, the same meals, for I suppose you'll feed from Juxton's?" she laughed a little maliciously. "Skilly! hot and hot," she quoted.

"But you, everybody, is tied in the same way; living in one place, having one's meals regularly . . ." It was absurd that her words should make him uncomfortable, there was no sense in them.

"No, no, no. The whole world is for the unattached, the free, the wanderers."

He was, of course, no match for her in argument, and

an element of impishness, half humour, and half mere mischievousness made her go on to draw a picture in luminous outline, not clear, but attractive, of what an unmarried man might do. Her talk had a certain stimulative quality, yet he hardly enjoyed it, and now and again he glanced uncomfortably at Mabel, hoping she would not wake up. But she slept, and Margaret talked, until the train slowed down at Parkstone.

"But of course marriage does not appear to you at the moment as it does to me. You are in love, and the prison door turns on oiled hinges."

Was he in love? That was not at all the way he would have described his feeling for Mabel. But he gave her no satisfaction of exclamation or contradiction, and now the train was already in the station.

"Well, anyway, we've had a nice talk. And your wife is just waking up. We shall meet again one day, I have no doubt, and then you will tell me what you think of my analogy."

Mrs. Lemon was very nice to Mabel when she woke, offering smelling salts and Eau de Cologne, for Mabel admitted a headache. But Mabel was much less responsive than Dennis. Mabel was rather afraid of "picking up acquaintances in railway carriages." Margaret saw the unformulated phrase in her expression when she politely rejected the smelling salts and the scent. Recognizing it, she explained about Cosmo Merritt, and her friendship with his father all over again. But Mabel had no interest in Cosmo, she rather distrusted him in a mild way, looking upon Ted's failure to pass his "Little go" as having been due to some carelessness or failure of duty on Mr. Merritt's part. Mrs. Lemon could not admit herself snubbed by the insignificant bride in the ill-made brown clothes, but she certainly could not imagine herself encouraged.

"You were rather short with her, weren't you?" Dennis

asked Mabel, after they had collected their belongings and were in the fly on the way to the hotel. "She seemed rather a nice woman, no side on."

"Oh dear, I hope I wasn't rude! But I am so afraid of promiscuous acquaintances; you never know to what it leads."

"It couldn't lead to anything we didn't want."

"You never know."

They drove almost in silence to the hotel. Dennis had hardly begun to think, it was almost the only exercise at which he had never tried his hand. Tennis, racquets, golf, football, had all at one time or another engrossed him, but thinking was not in his line.

Yet uncomfortably often, in the week that followed, Margaret Lemon's words recurred to him, that Marriage was imprisonment, that the wedding service was his *parole d'honneur*.

Mabel was awfully good; he was always repeating that to himself. She said she was going to share all his pursuits. Hitherto she had not been greatly concerned with athletics; but now she listened to his cricket talk, and often said how interesting it all was. She went with him to the Municipal Golf Course, where he began to give her lessons. But here she proved herself hopelessly, pathetically awkward; her unaccustomed hands fumbled, and never by any chance accomplished that for which she strove; when she tried to drive she tore up the ground far oftener than she hit the ball, and her putting, after the most patient tuition, was a tragedy of impotence.

"Oh dear, if it hasn't gone right off the green! I'm afraid I must have hit it too hard. Isn't it an unusually small hole? I don't seem to remember the last was so difficult." But the next, and the one after, elicited almost the same remarks. Mabel's vocabulary was limited. "Fancy that," and "Dear me," were large ingredients in her conversation.

Croquet and tennis fared no better than golf. Mabel was simply powerless and paralysed before a ball of any size or shape or colour. There was no doubt at all about it; she tried very hard, and very conscientiously to profit by the teaching she received, but in the end both she and Dennis had to admit that she had no aptitude for games. She was a good walker in a flat-footed determined way, but then Dennis hated walking; he needed an objective for his exercise. She urged him to find some one in the hotel with whom to play, she was really quite unselfish, and anxious he should enjoy his holiday. He did have a round of golf one day with a scratch player who was short of a partner, but his efforts to teach Mabel had put him off his game, and he was disgusted with the poor figure he cut. He couldn't "hit a ball" he told Mabel on his return, and she replied:

"Oh dear, I'm so sorry! I thought it was quite easy to hit them if you don't mind where they go."

She was very nice about it, nevertheless, and urged him to try again. But he had no heart for it. He said he did not like leaving her alone. She thought that very kind; so like him.

Before the fortnight was up they had nothing left to say to each other. He knew everything she would say before the words came out. It was impossible to find fault with her, she was so obviously intent on filling her new rôle of wifedom satisfactorily. She even deferred to his opinion, although he was younger than herself. They were not intimate enough to quarrel, and the sense of duty that governed both of them was an ever-present factor in their relations. She would not have married at all if she had not felt she would make a good and dutiful wife; she had prayed about it, and both Ursula and Agatha had talked a great deal to her about Dennis. She felt that she knew all his ways. In looking forward to her marriage half the pleasure of it had been that she

would really have housewifely rather than wifely things to do. Juxton's had been the bane of her girlhood, keeping her from her privileges. Now she counted his clothes when she sent them to the wash, and looked through them scrupulously on their return, searching for holes in the socks and for buttons off the underwear. The old ladies at the Vicarage had presumably done these things for him too, but he had never heard anything about them. He was surprised at the prominence they assumed.

Mabel began in the morning at breakfast to wonder if the washerwoman would call; her conversation trickled on about the number and variety of articles he was sending until the chambermaid announced the advent of the laundry cart. If Dennis had to run up to his bedroom for anything he found the clothes strewn all over the bedroom floor. He hated that, somehow. When they were once discarded he did not want to see his underclothes again, until, clean and folded, he found them in his drawer. It was to that he had been used. Now his soiled linen seemed to permeate his days. She was awkward and unaccustomed in her new duties, but happy and very conscientious over them.

"Dennis, do you remember if you have had five clean shirts since Saturday? I've counted them over three times, but I can't make them any less. And did I tell you those new socks of yours are going into holes so fast? I do wish I could get better darning thread here, but the shops are really very poor. They've torn quite a hole out of one of your pyjamas at the laundry. I believe it is a steam laundry, although they assured me it was all done by hand. And oh, Dennis, I do wish you'd come upstairs with me after breakfast, I believe they've sent you some one else's vest, or else it must have shrunk, it looks so much smaller than the others and it has a different name sewn in it. But that may be only a trick . . ."

One night, it was shortly before they were returning to

town, and he was restless with the anticipation of it, he had a very vivid dream. He was not used to dreaming, and the experience was as unpleasant as it was new.

He dreamed that the bed upon which he was lying was hard, and too short for his feet; he was cold, and for covering there was nothing but a thin, rough blanket, in which in his sleep he was trying vainly to enwrap himself. Now he was gazing at the light, it came dimly from one small window, high up in the wall, closed. No air came through it, and there was no air in the cell. The walls were whitewashed, and the floor stone-paved. The cold and the airlessness, a sudden access of fear, made him try to rise, but something held him where he lay. His breath came painfully, with difficulty, and he heard the sound of his own heart beating. He was chained, fettered, he heard the clank of iron, felt it on his cold feet: the clammy sweat broke out on his forehead. For he was not alone in his cell, some wretch, some malefactor, imprisoned with him, was breathing loud and coarsely by his side; he heard it distinctly, heard nothing so plainly. The knowledge that in his degradation he was not alone was worse than the cold, and the fetid air, and the fetters. There they lay, side by side, their flesh almost touching. And his crept as he tried to release himself, to get clear of this presence that made more fetid the air, and for which he had so unutterable a loathing. He made another frantic effort to rise, but there was a dreadful sense of suffocation upon him, and the frantic struggle left him where he was. Perhaps he lost consciousness for a minute, but was ever conscious of the wretched hopelessness of his condition. Now there was some one else at the door of the cell, staring at him through the grating, and the humiliation of it was unspeakable. He heard the uplifted bars, the clanking of heavy keys, the grating as one turned in the lock.

"Oh dear, I'm afraid I've overslept myself! There's the

chambermaid at the door with the hot water. I told her to call us at eight. All the clothes are on the floor — I feel quite chilly . . ."

Dennis was glad to be awake. This dream had been so vivid that he carried the sense of it about with him all day; there was little to distract his mind from it.

That day Mabel was full of lamentation over a lost sock. The third time she spoke of it an acute and unreasoning access of irritability made him exclaim, "What the devil does it matter?" But he was almost immediately sorry, for, after all, there was really nothing else to occupy either of them.

"It is so tiresome . . ."

Tiresome was one of Mabel's favourite words, and already it seemed to exemplify her. By the time the lost sock tragedy had been forgotten, the end of the honeymoon was in sight, and "packing" became the next subject to assume unnatural proportions. First he was told that he was not to bother at all about putting his things together; she would pack for him. Then it appeared that she had spent the whole morning "going over" her own clothes, and had no time to see to his, but would do it in the afternoon. He went out for a walk while she rested from her exertions. At tea time, in the hall of the hotel, he heard about it again, and that the feat of putting three or four suits and some underwear into a portmanteau had not yet been accomplished, but he "wasn't to worry." In the end, everything, having been talked over about half a dozen times, was actually done at least twice. Mabel had forgotten to leave out his or her own sleeping things, and, of course, they were at the bottom of the boxes, the contents of which had to be tumbled out on to the floor before they went to bed. This, too, she found very "tiresome," but secretly enjoyed it, and the consequence it gave her.

They had arranged to spend their last day in Christchurch.

During the drive they were silent, Mabel full of her unaccustomed duties, and Dennis unwontedly depressed. Mabel attributed Dennis's depression to the fact that the end of their holiday was so near; and she said once, sympathetically, that she wished she were able to help him in his business. But once in the Priory he began to recover his spirits. The grace and spaciousness, the wonderful groins and hatchet work, held and uplifted him, the screen filled his eyes, and for the moment the haunting dream of cell and whitewashed walls faded into dimness and unreality.

But Mabel knew as little of hatchet work as she did of golf, and all her exclamations were at the cleanliness of the place.

"Fancy keeping as white as this all these years!" The Flaxman group interested her chiefly because of the clothes.

"What funny shaped trousers! I suppose they are what were called pantaloons."

Quite soon she found the Priory chilly, and thought that it was time for them to be going; they might get a cup of tea somewhere, at a confectioner's, or at the station before the train started. During tea the inevitable wash figured again, and she confided to him that they were, after all, returning to London without a certain article of her wardrobe the nature of which she was too modest to mention.

In after years Dennis's memory of Christchurch Priory, and of all his honeymoon, had the washerwoman in the foreground of the picture, with Mabel only as her mouthpiece.

CHAPTER IV

MABEL, saying apologetically that sight seeing was so very tiring, slept in the train going home, as she had slept in the train coming down. But this time there was no Margaret Lemon to talk to Dennis, and he had only his thoughts for company. They took him backwards. Already when he had stood in the Priory before the monument to Shelley, the far finer one he had seen at Oxford came back to him, and memories revived of all that followed his visit there. Now, in the train going home from his honeymoon, he went over it all again.

He had gone up to Oxford with Mr. Paighton and two or three young Harrovians. *They* had anxiety about their examination; but he had none, and indeed there was no cause. It was at the hotel the evening after the examination that the blow fell which shattered his hopes, and altered all his life. Again he saw the dingy sitting-room at the Bull, and himself, rushing in, 'cocky' and confident, full of the questions, and the little difficulty they had caused him, expectant of his adopted father's praise. Mr. Paighton had been standing by the mantelpiece, and had listened to him with tender interest, and an encouraging smile. Then came a short pause, a little cough. Dennis had been impatient already of something hesitant in the manner with which his news was met; he knew he had done well.

"My dear boy, there is no doubt you have got through, and well through. And now there is something I think you ought to know."

He had been the son of the Vicarage, he knew he was the adopted son, further than that his thoughts had not

wandered. He had taken everything for granted. Now he heard he was a beneficiary of the whole parish.

How his young pride had sickened at hearing that he had been educated and brought up by charity! The collection that had been made for him, and of which Mr. Paighton spoke so calmly, seemed an unspeakable degradation. He knew at once that not one shilling more of the money must be spent. He would not go to College. Charity! The Collection! Even now, in the rumbling train, with Mabel opposite and his future assured, his cheeks grew hot at the memory of his emotions on that day.

Mr. Paighton had at first been surprised, shocked, disappointed at the way he took the news. It was Dennis's pride that had become inflamed, and surely pride was a sinful thing.

Dennis could not argue, but he knew that nothing would induce him to reconsider his first quick decision. Oxford and its dignity were not for him. If he had known earlier he might have tried for a Scholarship. But he was not going to live on charity any longer. When the clergyman realised the mental attitude he prayed both for and with the boy. To Dennis, then, all his triumphs in School and on the cricket field seemed but fresh humiliations. He had been entitled to none of the things he had taken as a right. Now he wanted to get out of Oxford quickly; he had meant to be so happy there.

Amos Juxton and Abe Abinger had been joint Trustees with Mr. Paighton of the Fund. Neither of them were college men. Mr. Paighton called them into consultation when he found himself powerless to persuade Dennis that it was his duty to take full advantage of his opportunities, and to spend his three years at Oxford; but naturally, perhaps, they neither of them saw eye to eye with him in his first distress. They thought that Dennis's decision showed the right spirit. That they should even think so was a fresh

shock to Mr. Paighton, but one that brought him presently to see that the very sin for which he was rebuking the boy was one he himself was committing. He had been proud of his adopted son, of Dennis's Harrow successes, of his cricket, the dawning scholarship, his awakening intelligence and promise. He wanted to see him cut a figure in his own old College; dreaming perhaps of undergraduate days revived, saunterings in quadrangle arm in arm with his son and pupil. He, too, had to bear the pang of renunciation. Now it seemed that it had been his own self-glorification that he was seeking. He had thought to mould Dennis's mind, but it was not akin to his, it was more independent. The Reverend Stewart Paighton thought charity beautiful, and successful begging but a leaf in his chaplet. Yet because his lowliness of spirit came from prayer and was not wholly natural to him, the little soreness and strain between him and his adopted son was only a question of days. Then he began to understand and sympathise.

Amos offered a seat in the counting house at Juxton's, and a commencing salary of twenty-five shillings a week. Amos admitted it was a very handsome amount, but he said he had no doubt Dennis would soon be worth it. As for the fifty pounds he had given all those years ago, he never had wanted nor expected them back. But if Dennis thought he ought to repay the debt, he, Amos Juxton, could not say that he disagreed with him. It would have stuck in *his* gizzard to know he had been brought up by charity, and for his part he never had held with keeping it from the boy. Abe Abinger, shrewder in some ways than the great Amos, and recognising suffering when he saw it, as he did now, in the boy's strained eyes and pale face, had less to say, although perhaps it was more to the point.

"Nobody expects their money back, it was a free gift, not a loan. But it is easy to understand that you want to repay it. In any case the question of the University can surely

wait a year or two, there is no hurry about it. Keep an open mind. It has all come too suddenly, too much as a shock. Don't do anything hastily. Come and see me and talk things over."

Mr. Abinger had to hurry away then; he usually had an important appointment when Amos Juxton was about.

Dennis sought Mr. Abinger the very next day. He was still feeling miserable and humiliated, and very uncertain of his plans. To go as clerk to Juxton's was horrible; yet he had not wavered in his desire to earn money, to make himself independent. Mr. Abinger had headed the subscription list with a hundred pounds, and Dennis wanted to tell him that he looked upon him as his first and largest creditor. Mr. Abinger might advise him, help him to make money. . . .

But Mr Abinger would not let him stammer out any of the things he had come to say. He offered the boy a whisky and soda, and a cigar, and said he was very glad to see him; it was "good of him to look him up." Dennis was not yet nineteen, and it soothed him a little to be treated as a man. The whisky and soda certainly did him good. Presently he found that his attention was being directed to the pictures on the walls; Mr. Abinger had a well-known collection. Dennis was asked his opinion of this or the other. The pictures, the room full of rare and beautiful things. Mr. Abinger's absorption in them, and the way he took it for granted that the boy had the same tastes, all had their effect. It was only when the visit had lasted over an hour that his host said:

"Your father was an artist, and if he had lived long enough would have made a great name. Those few months he was here I bought all the work he did. It was chiefly sketches of the Heath, and I could have sold them over and over again. But I kept them for you, in case when you grew up you cared for such things. Now do you care for such things, that's the question? Have you an eye, or only a stomach? If you

have the first, come to me in Bond Street, otherwise, take Juxton's offer."

It seemed to Dennis that he had always loved beautiful things, and when the portfolio of his father's sketches was put into his hand by Abe Abinger the sting of his dependence was all at once assuaged. Here was an inheritance of which he might well be proud. His father's pictures saved his self-esteem, gave him a place in the world. Abe and he understood one another quite quickly, although one was sixty, and the other a youngster.

Dennis refused Amos Juxton's offer. He heard that Amos thought it very foolish of him, and said that he would have pushed him on, and that he might have been Manager of a Depôt by the time he was thirty. Dennis went instead to the Gallery in Bond Street, where he very soon justified himself. He *had* an eye, taste, above all, industry, a real desire to be of use to his employer, and worthy of the large salary and commission that Abe gave him long before he could possibly have been worth it.

No University could have done more for the slow growing mind of the big schoolboy than the old Jew with his knowledge of the arts of all ages, his love of literature, and wide culture. Because Dennis was an instinctive athlete, with a strong body and a keen eye, he would have spent his days at Oxford earning 'blues' and playing games. In the Gallery in Bond Street he received his education, his character imperceptibly developing with his intelligence.

Within three or four years of his leaving Harrow all the subscriptions had been repaid, and Dennis found himself happier than had seemed possible when he heard the story of his childhood. If, nevertheless, he sometimes regretted Oxford, it was chiefly because of the Varsity matches. When, however, he had been invited to play for Middlesex, and Mr. Abinger had made everything easy for him by arranging that his work throughout the summer should be done in the days

when the County made no call upon him, in the early mornings, or late evenings; when, too, "The Grasshoppers" showed their appreciation of his prowess by making him a member, he became, externally at least, very like other young men, forgetting what had seemed to set him apart.

Both Mr. Abinger and Mr. Paighton were content with him. It was the time when Mr. Paighton was beginning to be absorbed with his own private doubts and troubles. They loomed so large, they seemed so great, that they left no room for minor matters. Even Dennis became a minor matter when Mr. Paighton's offices weighed upon him and his soul was torn with doubt.

Dennis might have suffered from this withdrawal of interest, if his character had not already been formed. As a boy he had been a good, clean, straightforward lad, a credit to his school, invaluable in his house, sincere, if silent, in his faith. As a young man he altered very little. He was quite ungrateful for any favours shown him by the ladies. Mr. Paighton had been wrong in thinking him moved at all by the temptation to which his undeniable good looks exposed him. He had a high standard of feminine conduct, and the old ladies at the Vicarage were the exemplification of it. The sirens who lured his fellow cricketers from the simple life were the antitheses of Ursula and Agatha. And one or two unforgettable incidents that had followed the irregularities of his friends had inspired him with something not unlike fear, confirming in him an asceticism that was not entirely priggish, nor yet perhaps quite temperamental, but the result of training, and perhaps of instinct. He was so much younger than his years. He was very much occupied, too, having the leeways of his education to make up. Abe may be said to have literally taught him to read. The summer may have been given up to cricket, but the winter saw him studying history under Abe's guidance, learning the inseparability of the arts from progress, and of one art

from another, acquiring culture insensibly, expanding his mind.

Abe might have helped him to a quicker knowledge of the world, the knowledge that was destined to come to him later. But before the time had come for warning, Abe had been stricken past speech. He dropped down dead in the street one day, suddenly, without an hour's illness. It seemed, however, that he had not been in ignorance of his danger; the inquest established that he had had valvular disease for years. All his affairs were in order, his will but recently made. He left Dennis the freehold of the Gallery, and the good-will of the business, his stock-in-trade. The rest went to charity; it came out that he had no near relations, no one dependent on him. He had always taken an interest in the boy; there was no one to complain because he had made him his heir.

Death is appalling in so sudden a form, and Dennis was greatly shaken by Abe's death. His responsibilities weighed on him, too, and fear lest he should be unfit to bear them. Already customers were shaking their heads over his youth and inexperience, advising him to put up the stock to auction, and let the Gallery. Abe had had a great reputation in the art world. Dennis's was still in the making. Mr. Paighton, he could see, agreed with the old customers.

But Mr. Paighton had altered much since Dennis had declined Oxford and justified himself in so doing. Imperceptibly Dennis had grown more intimate with his employer, had drifted a little apart from his adopted father. Whatever absorbed Mr. Paighton through the time of spiritual crisis he was passing, was as yet hidden from his family. The effect was to set him apart from them.

There was a cloud over the Vicarage, and nothing but gloom in the Gallery. Dennis, uncertain of the future, and self-distrustful, found Amos Juxton unexpectedly sym-

pathetic. Amos, when he heard the contents of Abe Abinger's will, thought young Passiful had done very well for himself, very well indeed. And he let him see that he thought so, which, as Dennis hardly understood the source of the congratulations, proved helpful, almost exhilarating.

"I couldn't have done as well for you as you have done for yourself," was a handsome and ungrudging admission that Dennis had been well advised in going to Bond Street instead of to Juxton's. In some curious way Amos, nevertheless, took a full share of the credit of Dennis's good fortune. He was proud of the boy, and took to reading the cricket reports with an ignorant appreciation of his prowess. Amos asked Ted why he did not play cricket, and lost no opportunity to point out that it had not interfered with Dennis's "chances." Dennis had the run of Fitzjohn's Hall, and, in a way, he and Ted were friends. It was after the abortive attempt to pass his "Little go." Ted was established at Juxton's now, hating it, but there seemed nothing else for which he was better fitted. Amos, encouraging Dennis to pull himself together, to take advantage of his opportunities, used him as a stalking horse for attacks on Ted. Ted had no business aptitude, loafed, was unsatisfactory in every respect; in truth it was wayward Fanny that absorbed him, although that only transpired later. Amos made light of the difficulties before Dennis when the Gallery and the business became his.

"Before I was your age, my boy . . ." prefaced many an anecdote of successful trading. Dennis was encouraged to come often to Fitzjohn's Hall, perhaps as an example to Ted, perhaps with some view to what followed. There the billiard table, and Ted, and Amos's interest in his affairs, helped him gradually to forget his troubles. Mabel, too, was kind, and always told him she was sure he would get on all right. He did not quite know how his engagement came about, nevertheless. It was after Ted had had per-

mission to pursue his wooing openly, when Amos had arrived at the conclusion that nothing but matrimony could cure him of his infatuation, when he had seen his proposed daughter-in-law, and been duly captivated by her smiles. It was the capture of Ted's father in those pre-matrimonial days that had set the coping stone on Fanny's vanity.

Dennis thought, indeed everybody thought, that Mabel was going to marry Roddy Ainsworth. The engagement had never been announced, and it was understood Amos was in ignorance of the affair. For Roddy was in no position to marry. He was the son of the local dentist, and next door neighbour to the Juxtons before Amos made a fortune, and moved into the big house. He and Mr. Ainsworth had been widowed almost at the same time. Their children had been brought up together. Roddy had tried his hand at one occupation and then another, sticking to nothing long. His father, too, like Ted's, was almost in despair of his ever becoming self-supporting. It was Mabel who found out that Roddy had a voice, who gave him his first encouragement to cultivate it, who was never tired of playing his accompaniments and practising with him.

To sing for a living seemed an easy way out of his difficulties in finding a career. There was some question of Grand Opera, but the Concert platform was more easily attainable. Mabel thought Roddy was capable of Oratorio. The blow came when that eminent impresario, Jabez Fowler, had been induced to give him a hearing. Mr. Jabez Fowler not only gave him a hearing, but offered him an "engagement." Not in Oratorio, nor on a Concert platform, but in Musical Comedy. Mr. Fowler was not as well known then as he has since become. But he had just secured the Colonial rights of "The Rickshaw." Everybody thought it was quite a fine chance for young Ainsworth. He would get stage experience, and his voice

would strengthen. Whatever the argument Roddy easily succumbed to it. He was in such haste to be off that he only just remembered to say good-bye to Mabel; certainly he had no serious thought about his attentions to her. Quite the contrary. He talked of being away for some years, of all he should see and do. He did not even ask Mabel to write to him. When she suggested it, as one who clings to a spar in shipwreck, he cast her back into the waves of desolation by saying he did not suppose he should have a fixed address. It is not given to a young and selfish man with the artistic temperament to realise how he can fill a plain girl's dreams, and Mabel was cruelly conscious now that they had little foundation.

It was the arrangements for Ted's marriage that brought things to a head. She was so miserable, she would be so lonely. . . . And Dennis, too, was lonely. They used to talk of art together; much that Abe Abinger had taught him he transferred to Mabel, never knowing how little she could understand it. Whilst Ted was courting Fanny, he and Mabel would sit together in the long winter evenings. He would talk of Blake, and she respond with Beethoven. Neither quite understood the language the other was talking, but it was better than sitting alone. If it had been summer it would never have come about, for Dennis would have been playing cricket. But there was nothing to do; it got dark so early that there was no time for golf: and he could not take days off, as he used, now that there was no one but himself in Bond Street. Perhaps he overrated his loneliness and his responsibilities; but then Mabel was very sympathetic, and he had no one else upon whom to pour his confidences. Neither had she. She did not put into words why she was so unhappy. It could not be only Ted's marriage, for Ted had long been absorbed in Fanny. Roddy went away before Ted's marriage.

Dennis, knowing very little about it, made up his mind

that Roddy must have behaved like a cad. He formed his conclusions on Mabel's reddened eyelids and dejected air. A word he tried to say had for response a hurried embarrassed answer that "it was all a mistake; there had been no reason to suppose . . ." And then a rush of tears had made him feel he had been a brute. It also inspired him with a desire to make amends for his brutality, to comfort her; she was such a gentle creature, it was cruel to have hurt her. Roddy was a member of "The Grasshoppers," and that seemed to make it worse, to make it more directly Dennis's concern. He had no more thought of Amos's millions, or Mabel's dot, than a gentleman has of gate money when he goes out as a twelfth man to field in an emergency. Roddy had 'chucked'; and he, Dennis, was on the ground. That represented his mental attitude. It was Amos who took prompt possession of the situation when he found Dennis drying Mabel's tears, mumbling out some incoherent words of comfort, and about there being "other fellows." Amos thought women ought to marry, and that his single daughter was a reproach to his domestic management, and to Juxton's.

"So that's how it is . . . well, well!" and a general expression of satisfaction put the young people in a position from which it was difficult to extricate themselves without "giving Roddy away"; which was of course an impossibility. And after all, as he told himself, he and Mabel were both so jolly miserable that they couldn't be worse off together. He liked Mabel better than any of the girls he knew, and far better than those who had thrust their attentions upon him. It must be remembered his social circle was Hampstead and not Mayfair. He did not like forward girls nor fast, not even athletic ones who pushed themselves where they were not wanted.

Mabel did a great deal of church work, and the Miss Paightons were very fond of her. They were astonished

to hear that she and Dennis cared for each other, but they were wonderfully ready to believe it. They were old maids, and loved a romance; the prospect of a wedding agitated them delightfully. Every one was astonished, but under the impetus of Amos's direct methods, Juxton's had the situation in hand in a trice, had sent out the announcements, and submitted a plan for the wedding almost before Dennis realised to what his comforting of Mabel, and condemnation of Roddy, had committed him.

Nevertheless, he had little misgiving until his wedding day. Mabel needed some one to take care of her, Ainsworth had behaved badly to her, she had always been awfully nice to him. . . .

And he admitted to himself now that he had liked the idea of being a married man, of having a home of his own. The shock of Abe's death had stricken him beyond his cognizance. The alteration in Mr. Paighton's manner was something not to be put into words, its very mystery added apprehension to its chill. He seemed to have retreated into himself, to have become inaccessible, as one apart from humanity.

The announcement of the engagement had restored Mr. Paighton to something of the old manner, the old cordiality. He had expressed satisfaction both about it and the fact that Dennis would have a life companion.

"I shall officiate at your wedding; after that . . ."

He had not said what he would do after that, but his expression had been melancholy. Dennis was glad to get away from mystery and melancholy. He had been interested, too, in the house Amos promptly bought for them. There was enough ground for a full sized tennis court, Dennis thought he could manage a putting green as well, it was really an uncommon garden, the biggest in the Terrace. At the Vicarage there had been trees and flower beds, but no lawn.

Mabel was very good about the garden. She said that she did not care at all for flower beds.

It was to this house they were coming back.

When Mabel woke up, and said:

"Oh dear, we must be nearly in London! I wonder if father got servants for us, and if he'll meet us at the station. Is my hat straight, Dennis? I believe I've been asleep. You did count the luggage, didn't you?" his married life had begun in earnest. It was for him to see what they would make of it.

The woman in the train, the woman they had met going down, could have known little about marriage. It was nothing like imprisonment; it was just giving a fellow something of his own to care about, some one to work for.

CHAPTER V

HAMILTON TERRACE is to be found in the St. John's Wood district of West London. Two rows of handsome villa houses, each in its own garden, lie behind the trees that are planted at regular intervals along the Terrace. There is a sense of seclusion, of comfortable middle-class luxury about the place. It is some distance from tube or omnibus; there is no cab stand. Either the inhabitants have their own conveyances, or are in no hurry to get to places of business or entertainment; there is a leisurely air amid the greenery.

At the top of the Terrace is a substantial church, the coping stone to its respectability.

Here, five years after their marriage, Dennis Passiful and his wife were to be found, living out their ordered days. They had altered very little, the chronicle of those five years is practically without incident. Dennis, under the clever counselling of his father-in-law, and with the assistance of a partner who did three fourths of the work for one sixth of the profits, had greatly increased his business prestige, and added considerably to his capital. He might almost be called a rich man. The firm had not confined its dealings to pictures. There had been one notable transaction in tapestry, and the much talked of acquisition and sale of the famous Fragonards. The partner, Mr. Dolland, was a man of fifty who had been in the curiosity trade for a quarter of a century. If he had understood that Mr. Passiful was a cricketer first, and only a man of business afterwards, he soon realised his mistake. Abe Abinger had been a good teacher, and Dennis had profited by his

lessons. He had a fine and cultivated eye, and a conscientiousness that kept his playtime within bounds. The Middlesex Committee, too, showed an accommodating spirit, and did not call upon him more often than was necessary. He played at Lord's and the Oval, but stood down when it was a question of the North of England, or the Midlands. He was thus enabled to put in a couple of hours at the Gallery before play began, and often dashed back again to Bond Street after stumps were drawn. And this dual personality of his had certain advantages. For some reason or other, and his conduct was always in accordance with the tradition, it came to be understood that Dennis Passiful was a gentleman. Certainly the Bond Street Gallery had an ever extending *clientèle* of collectors who liked to feel they were dealing with one of themselves, who talked batting and bowling averages in the intervals of bargaining for a Corot or criticising a Mauve, giving a certain unique tone and flavour to the business. The word "gentleman" has divers meanings. In Dennis Passiful's case it might be taken to include that he was a man of honour, a man of taste, and a man of good manners, in addition to being what is generally understood as a "sportsman."

But in many ways Dennis had failed to take advantage of his reputation and position. His social world was still neither Belgravia nor Mayfair. In the winter he played a great deal of golf; not at St. Andrews or North Berwick, but at Sunningdale or Stoke Poges. The lawn behind the house was laid out for clock golf, and his handicap was 4. Golf was, as yet, only secondary with him to cricket.

The greater part of his leisure was spent with that eminent Cricket Club, "The Grasshoppers." It was his habit in the summer months to take the tube straight from Bond Street to Hendon, where he kept a change of clothes. There, in the field sacred to the Club, he would practise at the nets, bowl to some budding Fry, discuss the affairs

of the Club, be at his best and happiest. His married life, like his business, was external to him. Here, he was himself, a big schoolboy to whom games represented life. With "The Grasshoppers" his position was unassailable. He was on the Committee, he captained the annual cricket week, and arranged many of their outside matches. He was affectionately and generally spoken of as "The Skipper."

"The Grasshoppers," take them all in all, were a very decent set of fellows, many of them cracks from the Universities, and there were one or two veteran County players. At the Club Dennis's wealth was perhaps a little exaggerated. He had subscribed a thousand pounds to the fund for purchasing the freehold of the Club ground. It was quite the custom of the members to come to him when they were in need, to borrow from him, and forget to pay him back. Perhaps he had come to look on "The Grasshoppers" as his own; certainly he had an *esprit de corps* about it, a sense of pride in its achievements. One season when "The Grasshoppers" had beaten in succession the "Zingari," the "Eccentrics" and the "Ramblers," he held his head very high, and when they ended up a two day match by beating a fine M.C.C. team at Lord's, he spoke of the affair with absolute arrogant humility. This was the year his own average was at its best. He had expected to have been chosen for "The Gentlemen and Players"; and a not unreasonable disappointment for the second time in this expectation may have been responsible for a certain restlessness and impatience with his happy circumstances, of which he became conscious in the early autumn. The change, however, may have dated from the straining of a ligature in his leg at the end of August. It was now quite cured, but it had seemed to alter his outlook a little, acted as a sort of warning that his boyhood's days were over. To contemplate his life without the athletic exercise that formed so large a part of it was difficult.

To the slight restlessness that he experienced every now and then, his adopted father's late actions may have contributed.

It had been Dennis's habit, ever since his marriage, to go regularly with Mabel to the church where they were married, St. Chrysostom on the Hill. But when Mr. Paighton startled and humiliated them all by becoming a convert to Romanism and giving up his charge, religion ceased to have a very definite influence upon Dennis. He himself was staunch to his faith, although he could not argue or reason about it. He was glad when Mr. Paighton entered a brotherhood and was removed from the scene. Argument ceased then, and Dennis could solace himself with a deep silent sympathy with Ursula and Agatha. He never varied in his loving attention to them. He seemed to realise how much he and his staunchness represented. He visited them at least once a week, and deferred to many of their old-fashioned prejudices. It was for their sake, although he never said so, that he still attended morning service on Sunday, going afterwards nearly every week of his life to the little house in Church Row, Hampstead, where they mitigated their unhappiness with charity.

Mabel, too, had leanings in these five years to Unitarianism, Theosophy, and the Roman Catholic Church; she had such a completely open mind. At this moment, for instance, Christian Science was absorbing her, and she talked its balderdash with the particular species of feeble emphasis that had become her note.

"It is so nice to think there is no matter, only mind," she told her husband. And Dennis was, as always, glad she had a new interest. He had no desire to confute Mrs. Eddy's inconsistencies nor argue with her new recruit. Mabel had to have hobbies. Dennis had learnt to be grateful when they did not interfere with any of his. There had been a time when she had babbled about cricket, watched

him practising, attended every match. Another phase had been when she interested herself in his business pursuits, asked innumerable questions about schools of painting, begged him to meet her at the National Gallery, or the Tate, explain Turner, or defend Rubens. She had never been able to distinguish Von Seghers from Rembrandt, nor to remember that Van Dyck and Van Eyk were the names of two distinct artists. This had bored him inexpressibly. When she began to take painting lessons he breathed a sigh of relief. He did not foresee how soon she would consider herself competent, and begin to decorate the house with her work. In truth Mabel had as little eye for colour as Dennis had ear for music.

The trouble was that her marriage had not relieved her, as she had hoped, of the burden of Juxton's Ltd. An incident in the early days of her marriage had left her under the impression that her father would be offended, hurt, if she kept house without the aid of that eminent firm. Mabel would never willingly hurt either her father's or anybody's feelings. Therefore, although housekeeping would have given her all the outlet she needed, she abandoned the happiness of it without a murmur and filled her days as best she could. The piano was associated in her mind with the happiest and most painful experience of her girlhood, experience it was her duty as Dennis's wife to forget entirely. She practised intermittently, and never when Dennis was in the house, an omission he hardly understood, a delicacy of mind that could hold no meaning for him. He had no retrospective nor other jealousy of Roddy Ainsworth. He had far rather she had practised twelve hours a day than donned a painting apron and produced masterpieces of still life in velvet and satin and other material, with which she decorated the house, and for which she was constantly asking his admiration.

Dennis, nevertheless, and notwithstanding the slight

restlessness that had supervened on the damaged ligature, was quite satisfied, and comparatively happy in his marriage. Mabel was little different from what he had expected, a little more fidgety and less competent than Ursula and Agatha, but of the same school.

Certainly Mabel considered their married conditions were ideal. The wash question reappeared weekly for a short time after their home-coming. Perhaps it was that, and Dennis's half humorous comment upon it, that had led to Amos's exhibition of feeling upon the matter, and the final decision that Juxton's should take over the entire housekeeping, leaving Mabel with complete leisure. Amos was proud of her music and her newly acquired painting. He said that he had often thought of taking up painting himself. He had no opinion at all of her housekeeping talents, and certainly no idea that in taking over the Hamilton Terrace household he was stifling a genius, relegating a mute inglorious Milton of the Kitchen to an eternal silence.

Dennis had become used to his meals being served to him in pipkins of the famous "Juxton" yellow ware. It was not the meals that weighed on him so much as the difficulty of keeping up a conversation with Mabel whilst they were in progress, or feigning an interest in the small beer, of which she had such an unending supply. There were intervals of silence between them, during which Dennis's conscience reproached him. "Now I've talked quite enough, it's your turn now" was an observation that invariably reduced him to dumbness. He *ought* to find things to say to her.

The house, to an observant eye, would have quickly shown the presence of two diverse personalities. It had been furnished by Juxton's, and was Amos's wedding-present to them. Amos's ideas in furniture ran to suites. There were fumed oak chairs, table, and sideboard, in the

dining-room; inlaid mahogany wardrobes in the bedrooms; gilt occasional chairs, ormolu mirrors, plush curtains, and Cinquecento cabinets in the drawing-room. There was there also a "suite" of two sofas, four large chairs, and a three-seated invention upon which no visitor sat, because, if he had, his back would have been turned upon every one else. All these were elaborately upholstered in a material known as satin damask, of which the colouring was brilliantly indistinct, and the design inextricably complicated. The drawing-room alone had cost Amos nearly five hundred pounds. There were grapes in relief on the cabinets, and for some inexplicable reason the name of Louis Quatorze had been attached to the whole decorative effect. The panels of the walls were hung with the same brocade that covered the chairs. But Mabel had not been able to resist adding half a dozen terra cotta plaques upon which she had painted fruits and flowers, and a few water colours of which the frames were the better part.

The library had escaped Amos. Mr. Paighton had thought Dennis would like room there for the treasures of his boyhood, for his school prizes and trophies, a bureau that had been intended for Oxford, a few personal possessions of his parents. The room was happily a large one on the ground floor, giving on to the garden. The bureau was undoubtedly Chippendale, and there was a writing table to complement it, half a dozen chairs of various designs showed the master's hand, a low bookcase ran along one side of the room, on it were a few rare pieces of Hawthorne, and above it were the sketches of the Heath. Over the mantelpiece hung a fancy picture of Dennis's mother as Ceres; obviously it had been a labour of love, and there were passages in it that were immature. The background and sky, the whole atmosphere, might have been by Corot; the figure was somewhat feeble. Dennis knew that his father was a landscapist, but he cherished the portrait of

his mother nevertheless. The Hawthorne on the bookcase worried Mabel a good deal.

"What a pity there are no pairs, no two pieces alike," Mabel said frequently, whenever she came into the room in fact. Dennis had grown accustomed to the remark, and the other one about the absence of a mirror, window curtains, or drapery. He received them with the silence that was becoming habitual with him, but nevertheless it came to be recognised that this was *his* room, and that neither vases from the neighbouring bazaars, nor pictures, nor plaques from her studio would be welcome. For Mabel had her studio on the top floor, with a skylight, where she worked industriously in all the intervals of her spiritual upheavals. She often wondered audibly what Dennis did in his, and questioned him about it. That "sharing his pursuits" idea of hers was the bugbear of his life. As a matter of fact, since his accident, he had begun to take an interest in architectural drawings. He kept them concealed in his desk, he would not have let her see them for the world. He knew how bad they were.

This morning, after nearly five years of married life, Dennis, first down to breakfast as usual, found himself wondering who first invented window curtains. He had a distinct desire to curse the man or woman who was responsible, but was restrained by a knowledge of the folly of such a proceeding. The dining-room was quite a large room that should have been irradiated by the autumn sun. Lace and muslin, flat against the windows, chilled its ardour, long curtains, draped to conceal the indelicacies of the leafless trees, made a further barrier, the final and most successful effort being in the red plush hangings and wide embroidered pelmet, which toned, so Dennis had been given to understand, with the Turkey carpet.

Breakfast had not yet arrived, but the fumed oak sideboard was arrayed for its reception with a lace-edged cloth.

The table, in addition to the "Juxton" napery in the "*Entente Cordiale*" design, was further embellished by a table centre of green satin on which Mabel had painted violet convolvuli; it also boasted an epergne heaped with oranges, apples, and almond nuts. "Juxton's" supplied so much dessert a day. The epergne was the cornucopia that was never empty. It graced breakfast, lunch and dinner, and stood all day long in silent testimony to the liberality of the firm. Fruit for breakfast was comparatively unknown in middle-class circles before Juxton's undertook the catering.

Dennis tried to get a glimpse of the day through the *vitrage* on the windows. But the tapes, top and bottom, held firmly, and he left the barricaded window with a movement of impatience. Dennis's expression was different from what it had been five years ago, his figure no less erect and graceful, although he had perhaps broadened a little. But that became him, he looked more of a man, erect, upright, as if he had been drilled. It was the bloom that had gone from eyes and skin, the one had lost their light, and the other its colour; his good looks were not exactly impaired, but they were dulled. The gold of the crisp hair had no burnish, the lines of the fine head were the same, but the clean shaven face showed a little hard, his lips seemed thinner. On his wedding day his expression had been that of the idealist, it glowed with youth and hope and all the promise of the world, sunlight on a waving field of corn would well have described the play of it, to-day shadow in stubble would have expressed it better.

Mabel came down punctually, she prided herself on her punctuality.

"It struck the half hour as I was crossing the hall," she said, triumphantly. "I was so afraid I should be late." She said the same thing nearly every morning, varying it sometimes, however, with a doubt as to the correctness of

the clock. "I wonder what they have got for us this morning?"

"You might almost know by this time," Dennis answered. "Being Tuesday, it's scrambled eggs and grilled herrings, with honey instead of marmalade."

"Oh dear! Yes, so it is. What a memory you have, to be sure."

Dennis could have told her more. He could have told her that presently she would say that she wished herrings had not so many bones, and that it would be nice if they could serve breakfast a little hotter. But he abstained; it was abstinence, perhaps, that was responsible for the hardening of the lines of the young face.

Mabel had altered less than he. She was still drab, but perhaps her shoulders were a little more rounded; and her inappropriate dress of shepherd's plaid, with green cloth facings, did nothing to improve matters. She looked every day of her thirty odd years.

They lived simply, well within their large means. The one taste they shared in common was love of the luxury of giving. Money matters were never discussed in the house. It was obvious that Mabel did not spend her allowance of £1000 a year on dress. There was no need for Dennis to stint himself when a comrade or a club was in need.

The covered tray, one solid piece of block tin, was brought in by the uniformed porter, and the parlourmaid followed to unload it. The twin coffee and milk pots, sugar basin and toast rack, were all in white china, and they, as well as the cups, saucers and plates, had the legend "Juxton's" upon them in gold. It was generally considered very tasteful. A brown covered dish held the scrambled eggs, and a tin one contained the herrings; the latter dish, as well as the whole tray on which the meal had arrived, had an ingenious double bottom to hold hot water.

These communal meals had grown extraordinarily mo-

notonous to Dennis, yet he had never attempted to alter the conditions under which he lived. Mabel, thinking she was thus gratifying both her father and husband, sometimes said disingenuously how nice it was that she had no housekeeping to do, and was free for her books, and painting, and social duties.

Mabel's social duties deserve a chapter to themselves. The Jones' and Smiths, the Browns and Robinsons of Hampstead and Highgate, St. John's Wood and Maida Vale, and other outlying parts had all their separate Mondays or Tuesdays, Wednesdays or Fridays; and Mabel neglected none of them. Round and round, like a squirrel in a cage, she trotted to their houses. She, of course, had her own "at home" day, once every fortnight, when she sat in the Louis Quatorze drawing-room dispensing Juxton's rout cakes and cucumber sandwiches, adding to it art, or church, or local gossip, as mild as the refreshments. Gossip was never ill-natured in Mabel's drawing-room. Her outlook may have been limited, but her blue short-sighted eyes saw nothing of the evil in the world.

This morning over breakfast she was as usual full of conversation, and Dennis less than ever disposed to it. He would so much rather have read his newspaper. But he did not want to be unkind, so "The Sportsman" lay unopened beside his plate, and although he was longing to read it, he drank his tepid coffee, and ate his eggs to this accompaniment:

"Mary hasn't been well these two days. I wonder if you noticed how she has been limping. Dr. Lauder says she has a white knee. At first he said it was what they call a housemaid's knee. But when I told him she was parlourmaid, he gave it the other name, he is so quick. But it's very tiresome." Then came the desire for the alteration in the anatomy of the herrings for which Dennis had been unconsciously waiting; it fell on his bruised intelli-

gence like the pain of a blow. But he had braced himself to meet it. After that there was more about Mary's knee, and details of treatment, which seemed to bring the smell of arnica into the room, and make the communal breakfast more unpalatable. But Mabel did not notice his distaste. They had dined out last night and she had had no opportunity to unfold her budget of news. She always had a budget of news, domestic or mildly social, with which she deemed it her duty to entertain her husband at meal times. It did not seem "quite right" that their meals should be silent ones.

"Oh, and I forgot to tell you. I saw Fanny yesterday; she is so full of her new house. I do wish you could find time to go with me one afternoon to see it. Fanny, I am sure, would take it as a great compliment if you would, although she did not say anything about it. I'm sure it's just to your taste; she was telling me about it, it is all so original! There are no blinds, and all the ceilings are painted black. There is gold paper on the walls and the electric light comes through Japanese lanterns. It's quite oriental; I think I shall paint her a screen, just a peacock; it would look nice on looking-glass. Don't you think it would be nice on looking-glass? I could fix it with 'turps.' Mr. Merritt is helping her with the house, he has chosen everything for her."

"Are Ted and Fanny getting on any better?" Dennis asked as he finished his breakfast, and lit a cigarette. "Ted looks miserable. Your father says he doesn't work; takes no interest in the business."

"I think it will come all right, I do hope so. Fanny says Ted is so violent."

"Ted never finds fault with Fanny, does he?" said Dennis drily, opening his paper, but without much hope of being able to read it.

"He is really quite devoted to her; it is all such a pity.

If only Ted were a little more intellectual." Dennis had at last opened his paper, and was rapidly scanning the columns that interested him.

"Intellectual! But Fanny is one of the most ignorant young women I have ever met in my life."

"Oh no, Dennis! I've heard you say that before, but really I think you misjudge her. I do think sometimes you are a little hard on Fanny. She often says you don't like her, but, of course, that isn't true. She may not have had much education, and it is true that she never reads, or hardly ever, but she gets up so late that she hasn't time. And she so often has headaches, she really isn't very strong. But Mr. Merritt says she is more than intelligent. He told Father so, and *he* really is very clever. And he is good to Ted. Ted says he has always been good to him, as if it was his fault, or the fault of the coaching, that poor Ted did not get into Cambridge, and had to go into business."

Mabel had not the gift of lucid speaking, but Dennis understood what had been told to her, and what she wished to convey to him. He could finish his paper when he got to the office. He must listen to what she had to say, he left her so many hours alone.

"It is such an advantage for them both to see so much of Mr. Merritt. When he and Fanny have had a tiff he just smooths things over, or takes Ted out with him. He has introduced him quite lately to his great friend, such a charming woman, a Mrs. Margaret Lemon. And he is going to make Fanny join a Bridge Club. She has been having lessons. He says she and Ted see too much of each other."

Dennis's time of release was near at hand. Already he had risen, and was at the door, when Mabel's next observation arrested him.

"There is some talk of Mr. Merritt living with them for a time. Grosvenor Street is so convenient for his Club. His

father has a house in Curzon Street, but it is often shut up. Fanny says she is quite content to do without a drawing-room if Ted would like Mr. Merritt to live with them. He could have his own bedroom *and* sitting-room, if she gave up the drawing-room. He might lend it to her on 'at home' days!" Mabel added, very pleased with herself for the after-thought; it made everything so much simpler. It *was* rather dreadful to think of Fanny having no drawing-room, although, of course, just now she had no regular 'at home' day. Fanny knew so few people. Women did not care for Fanny, nor she for them. "He could easily lend them the drawing-room once a fortnight, or once a month if he lived with them," she repeated.

"Live with them! Good Lord!"

"Of course he would pay something, and Fanny is a little extravagant, but then she was not brought up like other girls. It would be nice for Ted to have a man in the house to talk to. I must say Fanny spoke most considerately about Ted. She says she knows his life is uncongenial."

"And what does your father think about this scheme of Cosmo Merritt sharing Ted's home?"

Dennis was really a little startled, uncertain what to say. He knew the quality of Mabel's mind, and how incapable she was of realising evil. But Amos, surely Amos would see that it would be a mistake. Already Hampstead was gossiping about the trio. Dennis forgot to reckon with Amos's vanity, to which Cosmo had laid a slow successful siege.

"Oh, father! Father thinks it quite a good idea. He says Fanny and Ted might get into quite a nice set. Lord Loughborough would be coming in and out when he was in London. And this Mrs. Lemon, who is Mr. Merritt's most intimate friend, knows so many literary people. Father is thinking of writing something himself. He is full of ideas. It is only just setting them down, and Mr.

Merritt would help him in that; a sort of collaboration you know. Father says he is sure any one could write who liked, and the business is so well organised now that it runs itself. He has more leisure now than he has had for years; he thought of taking up painting a little while ago. Oh dear, here's the man for the things already!" Mabel was more leisurely over her meals than Dennis, and her talk took up time.

"You will come and see the house one afternoon, won't you? It isn't five minutes from the Gallery."

"I'm fearfully busy just now." He looked it, and as if he wanted to be off.

"I know. You do work so hard." She was as sympathetic as was compatible with helping Juxton's man to gather together the breakfast things. "I told father so, and he said he wished Ted had half your energy. Don't go. I know there was something more I wanted to say to you."

But he escaped the rest for the moment. He was at the hall door when she called out:

"Oh! And will you be home to dinner?" She asked the same question every day, although it was only during the cricket season that he failed to present himself for the evening meal.

Walking down to business this morning with the pressure of her presence removed, he found himself wondering about married life generally, and whether his was really, in essentials, the same as that of other men. Certainly Ted's was different. Poor Ted! He had married for love, he had been mad about Fanny. Now their quarrels formed a favourite subject of conversation for all their friends. Only Mabel seemed unable to grasp how badly Ted's wife treated him, or how their friends talked about what was already recognised as a *maison à trois*. If Cosmo Merritt took up his abode under their roof the talk would be doubled and redoubled.

It was horrible to see how Ted suffered under Fanny's tongue; how he lost his self-control, and made scenes at all times and places. There was no doubt Cosmo Merritt did act as a sort of buffer between them. Ted appealed to him sometimes; and publicly, at least, he always supported Ted. But the whole thing was a nightmare.

If Dennis was not very exhilarated at the moment with his own marriage, when he compared it with Ted's he felt he was ungrateful. Mabel's tongue had no rasping qualities. She had neither coquetry nor malice.

He could not shake off his sympathy for Ted as he walked down the Edgware Road and turned into Oxford Street. Ted was not clever, nor an amusing companion, was inclined to moroseness, and unequal in temper. But Fanny! Fanny was enough to make any fellow morose and uneven in temper. Ted was so straight. Of course she lied to him constantly, ran him into debt, treated him with contemptuous indifference. Dennis resented his father-in-law's indulgence towards Ted's wife, and Mabel's blindness to her real character. This morning's news seemed to make matters worse than ever. He wondered how long they would all be before they found her out.

Ted and his affairs lasted him until he got to Oxford Street. Crossing the road, a passing motor, going too quickly, splashed him with mud, and gave an even more dingy turn to his reflections. Life looked sordid this morning. He tried to recover himself by conjuring up a visual memory of a red lacquer cabinet, Chinese or Queen Anne, to be sold at Christie's at the end of the week.

The detail of the cabinet helped him until he got to his office, where he found Mr. Murray Straus awaiting him. Mr. Straus had a shop for the sale of works of art, a little lower down the street. He was a bearded man, genial and insincere. It appeared he was waiting for Mr. Passiful in order to talk about the weather, and the disgraceful

state of the streets, the outrage of permitting motor buses to go down Bond Street whilst the road was up, and the news from Morocco in the morning paper. It was only just as he was going, and Dennis had been wondering for five minutes what was in the post and when he should get to his letters, for Mr. Dolland was away, that Mr. Straus said casually:

"What about that lacquer cabinet? I saw you standing quite a long time before it yesterday at Christie's. You're not going in for it, by any chance?"

He criticised and belittled it, pointing out that one of the mounts was very doubtful, and that incised lac was not really fashionable. But when Dennis defended the cabinet, and said he intended bidding for it, Mr. Straus came to the object of his visit, and suggested Dennis should join "the School." Mr. Straus was full of *bonhomie* and desire to do Dennis a good turn. It was not everybody that he would "take in" with him. And he told of a fine chasuble that had been "protected," when one solitary bid of five pounds had secured the lot. Afterwards it had been put up at their own private auction, and Clayton had gone to four hundred pounds for it. "The School" had made over forty pounds each. He told of other similar transactions, all very casually, but Dennis was sufficiently cognisant of the trade to know that he was anxious there should be no competition for the cabinet.

Dennis disliked these combinations; "knock outs" they were called. He thought them unfair to the vendor and to the auctioneer. When he said so, Mr. Straus became less genial. He wished Mr. Passiful a curt "good-morning." He said he thought he'd find it a mistake to have the trade against him. One could do a man a bad as well as a good turn in business. Mr. Passiful was still young. . . . Dennis ignored the implication, saw him out, trying to talk pleasantly about general matters. But when he was alone he

reviewed the incident and found it beastly. He thought everything was "pretty beastly" this morning. The housemaid's white knee, Mabel's green plaid dress, Ted's married life, and Cosmo Merritt's strange inclusion in it, seemed all part to him of the general disillusionment of life.

The depression lingered with him during the early morning, it made talking to customers a weariness, and his normal pleasure in the beautiful things with which he surrounded himself in the Galleries begin to pall. He saw where Lawrence was merely pretty, and Raeburn hard, disliked the newly acquired Opie with which he had been in love but yesterday, and knew that the pale and faded portrait by Sir Joshua Reynolds for which he had refused two thousand five hundred pounds was not worth more than the canvas upon which it was painted. Yesterday he had been proud of his little exhibition, to-day he was ashamed of it. There was no doubt that the much belauded Eighteenth Century School of English Art was not comparable with the Dutch or the French renaissance.

He thought that prices were already too high, and that a slump was at hand. He remembered things Mr. Abinger had taught him, when Claude was unsaleable and Millet unappreciated; he determined to alter the whole policy of the Gallery, and concentrate on Matsys. He thought other absurd things; but then he was worried with Ted's affairs. He liked Ted.

It was now that Roddy Ainsworth's card was brought to him, and it took him quite a few minutes to remember why the name was familiar.

"He would like to see you himself, sir," the man waited respectfully. "He says you are old friends, and I was to tell you it was business as well as pleasure."

Roddy Ainsworth! Roddy Ainsworth? Of course, the best lob bowler they ever had in the Club . . . that was

the first thought. They would be short of a slow bowler next season, there was no promising youngster. . . . Then he remembered about Roddy and Mabel. But had they ever been engaged? He had long since begun to believe it possible that Mabel might have deceived herself.

Yet at first he told the man to say he was too busy, he could not see Mr. Ainsworth: Mr. Jones would attend to him. For that was what Mr. Abinger used to do with a new customer, or one for whom he had no mind. But then Dennis hesitated. He used to like Roddy, he might be useful to the Club. In the end he walked into the Gallery, where Roddy, hardly altered at all, greeted him with a cordiality that had obviously no *arrière pensée*.

"Hullo, old chap! It's good to see you again. And how's the Club, and all the old brigade?" He could not but respond in the same tone. He was surprised at his own cordiality.

"I only got home yesterday. I asked which was the Abinger Gallery and heard it was yours now. Rather a good thing, isn't it? I suppose the old man's dead? It doesn't seem like five years that I've been away."

"Is it five years?"

"More or less. I've been all over the place. We toured America; but since then I've been to Australia, South Africa, I don't know where."

"Touring?" Dennis was momentarily puzzled by the word: no team he knew of had that sort of roving commission.

"In Musical Comedy, Max Herbert's parts. You read the papers, don't you?"

Ainsworth was evidently annoyed that Dennis did not recognise his consequence.

"Considering I've sung in every decent musical play that has been produced for the last five years, and that except in London, perhaps, I'm as well known as the Statue of

Liberty, it's ridiculous to pretend you don't know what I've been doing."

Dennis apologised. When he looked at him he recognised it was the actor and not the cricketer with whom he was making fresh acquaintance, and that the alteration he had not noticed was nevertheless there. Ainsworth had always been a handsome fellow, now his good looks had become sharpened, accentuated, he wore them, as it were, with ostentation. His hair was a little longer than that of ordinary men, and his soft felt hat had a rakish air. His talk, his laugh, his gestures were all obvious, his roving eye asked shopmen and customers to note he was there. He had the air of expecting applause, a self-consciousness that demanded it.

When he had talked a little about the Club and a great deal about himself, he came to the real object of his visit. He seemed to expect that Dennis would take him out to lunch. He recollected to call him "Skipper," and reminded him how he had kept his end up when Dennis was making his first century against the "Zingari." Roddy wanted something of Dennis and he was not without tact in approaching him.

They lunched at the Ritz. Roddy said he had heard it was the best food in London. It was not until he had succeeded in satisfying a most histrionic appetite, and was enjoying black coffee, Kummell, and the big Upmann with which Dennis had supplied him, that he opened his business.

"I sent you in word it was business I wanted to see you about; though it comes second to friendship, old fellow." Roddy had a touch of sentiment in him. "To me you'll always be 'The Skipper.' I often thought of you out there. Well, the fact is, I want you to help me."

By now Dennis had no doubt of it, he had had so much experience. But he was not averse; perhaps he liked to be

leaned upon, consulted. He did not smoke cigars in the middle of the day, but he lit a Lucana cigarette, and leaned back prepared to listen.

"I've got an option on a play, one of the best musical plays ever written. Ever heard of 'Charles Auchester'? It's a dramatised version of 'Charles Auchester.' 'Seraphino' might have been written for me. Of course they've made him a singer instead of an instrumentalist." He paused, obviously to think how well "Seraphino" suited him. "What's the good of a play if you haven't got a theatre? Amos Juxton is made of money, isn't he? Mabel and I were awfully good friends. . . . You married Mabel, didn't you? That's really what made me come to you first. And she could influence her father, too. He's got money to burn. He used to talk about having a theatre in the old days, and giving the people pure plays. Nothing could be purer than 'Charles Auchester.' Now, old fellow, for old sakes' sake, and because it's a good thing — mind, I wouldn't put either of you into it if I didn't know it was a good thing — will you help me to get up a little Syndicate? I've heard of a theatre; the 'Kemble' will be vacant by the end of the month. I've got friends, I've got three thousand pounds promised. I only want another seven thousand. Of course it's an expensive production."

He was a little breathless, and very eager. He added argument to argument, was overwhelmingly persuasive and persistent. For at first Dennis was wholly negative. He was sure Amos would not think of putting money into a theatrical Syndicate. He, himself, would be extremely averse from such a speculation. Roddy started to expatiate upon what a lot of fun there was hanging to it; about the stage door *entrée*, little suppers with chorus girls. When he saw that he was on the wrong tack, for Dennis sat quite silent when such suggestions were being made, and gave him no encouragement, he went easily back to the other

argument, and showed what a lot of money there was in Musical Comedy, particularly when, as in this case, they had hold of such a really fine thing.

"The music is perfectly wonderful. It's by a new man, and it's going to make a sensation. There's a concerted piece for four in the first act which will make all London sit up. It's great, I tell you, great."

Dennis took a lot of persuading. The room, that had been full when they entered, grew slowly emptier; table after table was deserted, and their waiter stood a little way off, obviously expectant of Dennis's request for the bill. It was almost three o'clock before Dennis, still somewhat reluctant, had been persuaded to sound Amos, had even promised if Amos "came in," he would take a small share.

"And you'll never regret it, Skipper, you'll never regret it." Roddy was quite flushed and enthusiastic, one would have thought he had the whole of the seven thousand in hand. "When will you see him; we mustn't let the grass grow under our feet. I ought to set about negotiating with the theatre people at once. Tell Mabel all about it, won't you? It was Mabel first found out about my voice. Good old Mabel! I suppose she hasn't altered. I was always awfully fond of Mabel. I'd like to see her again. Where do you hang out?"

When Dennis succeeded in getting rid of him, he was surprised how far he had allowed himself to go. He seemed to be committed to the whole mad scheme. It was a mad scheme. What did he or his father-in-law know about theatrical Syndicates? Amos had many interests, many irons in the fire, but as far as he knew none of them were theatrical.

Yet, as the day wore on, as the influence of Roddy's presence and personality vanished, he did not find himself more, but less, unwilling to do what had been asked of him. It was something new; his life had got into a rut, stagnant.

Then he caught himself wondering what Mabel would say when she heard that Roddy Ainsworth was back in England. She could hardly exclaim, "How tiresome!" Yet her vocabulary was so limited, he found it difficult to conjure up another phrase from her lips. But perhaps she would ejaculate, "How nice!"

Had Mabel altered, he wondered? It seemed to him she had always been just the same, and always would be. She was so good, no one could find fault with her; unselfish, without guile. It was hateful that in the foreground of his mind a word should linger. Was she a bore? Did she bore him? He really wondered what Roddy would think of her, and she of Roddy.

CHAPTER VI

DENNIS, after Roddy had left him, made another inspection of the red lacquer cabinet at Christie's, saw a doubtful Gainsborough, and an undoubted Teniers, quite one of the finest things that had been in an auction room for many years. Yet, for the moment, as he went down the steps of Christie's, and passed into King Street, his interest in them both seemed subordinate to his interest in Roddy Ainsworth, and life generally. He had grown too much absorbed in things, to the exclusion of people, he reflected. *If* Roddy Ainsworth took a theatre, *if* Amos Juxton had a share in it, *if* he himself went into the Syndicate, as Roddy had suggested, what a change might come in his monotonous days! He felt his pulses quicken, and to steady them, as he walked, he took mental stock of his banking account. There was no reason he should not have a little speculation in a theatrical Syndicate, particularly if his father-in-law was in it too. Amos had many irons in the fire, Juxton's gave him endless scope. Dennis had often put money into commercial undertakings on Amos's advice, and there was no doubt his own fortune had grown in consequence. Capital was what had been needed successfully to carry on the Gallery, and Mabel's dot had supplied it. But that was five years ago. There were no longer any difficulties, and it was understood in the trade that the Juxton millions were behind Dennis Passiful. He had done well in every way, and his fine credit had a substantial cash backing.

From a purely pecuniary point of view, those five years of his marriage had been five fruitful years. It had been

under Amos's advice and with Mr. Dolland's co-operation that he had added antique furniture, tapestry and works of art to his dealings in pictures. "There was room in the Galleries," the "opportunities for acquiring and selling the one were generally opportunities of selling and acquiring the other." Amos hammered home his arguments by examples from his own experiences. Amos, for instance, using many cigars in his business, found it advantageous to become a shareholder in the business of a Havana importer. Besides manufacturing their own cigarettes, Juxton's participated in the profits of many brands that the firm supplied. So with wine, and whisky, and other commodities. He had often spoken of catering for the refreshment bars of theatres, and talked of going in for it. The more Dennis considered, the more probable it appeared that Amos might be willing to finance a season at the "Kemble" Theatre, if the bars were free. He had no hesitation in going to him about it. He and his father-in-law were on very good terms; and he knew where to find him at this hour.

Dennis caught Amos just as he was leaving his office. He had a man with him, another waiting, and had hardly a moment to spare. But he spared his son-in-law the half minute.

"Theatrical Syndicate! Well, well, what will you be thinking of next? Why not, my boy, why not? Grist to the mill, it's all grist to the mill. As a matter of fact it might suit me quite well. The 'Kemble,' did you say? A new play? Never mind about the play, the theatre's the thing. I'll tell you why afterwards. I'll come round this evening and talk it over. I'm up to my neck now. No, not to dinner, Merritt is dining with me. I'll be round about half past nine. Excuse me, I must rush away now."

Dennis got home in time to dress for dinner. He would have liked a bath, and half an hour to himself. He wanted to marshal Roddy's arguments and prepare them for Amos;

he had to tell Mabel that Roddy had returned. But solitude and leisure were not for him. He ran up to his dressing-room, and had hardly taken his coat off before there came that perfunctory rap tap at the door.

"I suppose I can come in. I heard the street door shut, and I knew it must be you. I've got so much to tell you. I'll sit with you whilst you're dressing. I had such a crowded afternoon. The Cheltons came, and the Darrels, all the way from Canonbury, and the Lindsays. . . ."

Never had he found her emphasis so flat and unnecessary, the string of names she reeled off, and her observations about them, so futile. And she was so anxious to be of use. She wanted to get him another towel, to put in his studs, to help him with his boots; it was Mabel's way to talk about doing things, instead of doing them. Juxton's intervention had deprived her of her domestic faculties. She had the desire to be of service, but her capacity was as flaccid as an unused muscle. But that was also perhaps a little Dennis's fault, he hated having things done for him, he negatived all her offers, abruptly, curtly. She was not at all offended, she sat by the dressing-table, just where she was most in his way, and went on talking:

"Fanny promised to come, but she never came until nearly six o'clock. Then it was all so unlucky. Fanny has just joined a Bridge Club, Crockford's it is called; it is quite close to the new house. She was telling us how smart it was, and about the Committee, all Countesses and Duchesses, and I don't know what, when Ethel Jones came in. You know how she and Fanny can't bear each other, although I'm sure I don't know why, Ethel is such a nice girl. . . . Well, to bring her into the conversation I said:

"'Mrs. Ted is telling us about Crockford's, she has just been made a member, it's all so interesting.' Then up answered Ethel Jones in that bright way she has:

"'Oh, Crockford's! My Mother is one of the original members. Lady Slater founded it, and she put Mother up, but Lady Slater left a long time ago, and then all the Committee resigned. It has gone down very much since then. The man who was the Club wine-merchant is now the Chairman of the Club! He was never paid for the wine he sent in, but he has been paid now. They are always sending round the hat, just to keep the Club going. I often go and fetch Mother, if I'm in the West End, but there are a dreadful lot of people there now. Anybody can get in who can pay, or promise, a subscription.'"

Mabel went on to say that she thought it such a pity that Miss Jones had come in just then. She was in such a lovely dress too, red chiffon over painted mauve charmeuse, and a large hat from Paris, which made it worse. It appeared that Fanny hardly stayed a minute after that, and Mabel had so wanted to ask about Ted, and the new house, and everything.

"Why did the dress make it worse?" Dennis asked. He was recovering his jeopardised temper, had finished the struggle with his tie, and was nearly ready to go downstairs. He rarely followed Mabel's talk very closely, but this seemed more inconsequent than usual.

"Well, you know, Dennis, Fanny *is* a little strange about such things. She thinks girls ought not to dress too well. She says one never knows who pays for their clothes." Mabel brought out Fanny's spiteful innuendo so innocently, it was obvious the inference of it had completely missed her. She wound up a little lamely by repeating, "And Fanny never has liked Miss Jones."

"Nor any other good looking, smart, or amiable young woman," Dennis finished, with a final glance at the looking glass, and a pat to the obstinate necktie.

"You *are* so prejudiced against Fanny," she murmured, following him downstairs. "You know you are, Dennis."

"And always shall be until I see Ted looking a little happier, and not as he does now, like a man under torture. I told you so this morning."

"Oh! But you don't think really that Fanny is a bad wife? She always says she is sorry for Ted. He has so few hobbies, she never minds if he wants to go out. He is very morose at home, I'm afraid. Fanny says she is almost frightened of him."

"There are many ways of being a bad wife," Dennis answered shortly. He was beginning seriously to dislike Fanny, but could hardly give Mabel chapter and verse for his alteration of feeling. "Ted wants sympathy, not criticism."

That Ted wanted more than that from his wife and got less, was known to everybody, apparently, but Ted's sister and Ted's father. If she were subtly, and continually, cruel to him, his humility still found excuses for her, and his love and loyalty held. Dennis suspected more than he knew, and if he despised Ted for his weakness, he was always sorry for him.

There was a great similarity about the Juxton meals, dinner resembling breakfast in the service, and lukewarm abundance.

Mabel's evening dress was brown, with a tucker of blue lace and some trimming of the same. It was new, and had been worn in the afternoon with the "neck filled in." Mabel told him that, after she had finished for the fourteenth time the story of the lady who said she always had to have flat fish for dinner because her rooms were so low. Mabel thought this the best story she had ever heard, and Dennis sat through it every time Juxton's supplied soles. Then she came back again to Miss Jones.

"Oh! And I forgot to tell you, she says she shall go in to Crockford's just to see how Fanny gets on. I don't think that was quite nice of her, do you? And Mrs.

Smithers asked her to come to dinner afterwards, and tell them about it. She doesn't like Fanny either. I can't think why so many people don't like Fanny. She had quite a rude letter the other day from a Mrs. Walker. And only because Mr. Walker had been to see her three or four times. Fanny thought he would be so congenial to Ted. . . ."

The dining-room was a shade closer and less stimulating in the evening than it had been in the morning. Mabel was a martyr to neuralgia, and open windows were a signal for its onset. Dennis had struggled in the first year or two of his marriage to persuade her of the advantages of fresh air. But the attitude of her mind toward it was ever hesitant and uncertain; there is little doubt that her very anxiety to fall in with his views helped to bring about the result she dreaded. That was why they had so soon decided on separate bedrooms. Dennis slept with his windows wide open, no blinds. Mabel liked the windows fastened up, and everything quite dark. It was due perhaps partly to Mabel's idiosyncrasies that the dinner was always reminiscent of breakfast, and breakfast of dinner. Mary's ideas of the amount of airing a room required were limited by the knowledge of the amount of dust an open window encouraged.

The same liveried porter had brought in the same block tin tray, and in the same ware were served soup and fish, entrée and roast. They all arrived together, and were ranged upon the sideboard. The hot water dishes were supposed to keep them in a state of suspended animation; "ready for eating" was Amos's phrase. Mary's white knee had necessitated her attendance at the hospital. The porter put the soup and plates on the table.

"It will be so nice, we can wait upon ourselves," Mabel said when she had given the necessary explanation. And she jumped up before the soup was finished to make sure the fish was not being spoiled, forgetting where to find the

plates, bringing the wrong ones, and dessert knives instead of those intended for fish, making a great clatter with dishes, and generally displaying an awkwardness in domestic service, that, combined with the atmosphere, made it difficult for Dennis to conceal his impatience. He would so much rather, in Mary's absence, have allowed the porter to remain, as he suggested — for Juxton's were used to emergencies with servants — or even to have gone without dinner at all. Mabel could do nothing without talking about it, handle nothing without spilling a part of it. But always her intentions were admirable, and she said, after the uncomfortable dinner was over, how much she enjoyed waiting on Dennis.

During the bustle and confusion her attempts had brought about, it was impossible to bring out his news. Mabel was never a restful person. Sofas and easy chairs lured her in vain. She found needlework 'fidgety,' and rarely read a book sufficiently interesting to lose herself in it. She also had a suspicion that reading was another name for 'idling.' Dennis would often try and read in the morning-room after dinner, but was never safe from his wife's interruptions. She meant well, she thought it part of her duty to talk to her husband in the evening, the "only time they were together," and her attempts at sprightliness, the purpose of which was so clear, vexed him by the knowledge that he resented rather than appreciated her efforts.

To-night, when she had finished fidgeting with the dinner things that Juxton's man would have done equally well if she had left them alone, she announced that she knew what he wanted, and was going to fetch it for him. And she trotted off, heedless of his remonstrance, to return to the morning-room with a stale pipe he had long ago discarded, and some tobacco which she spilled out of the pouch.

"I haven't smoked that pipe for years. I wish you wouldn't mess about," he began, rising from his easy chair

to take them from her. But he failed to finish his sentence, for her face fell, when she realised she had not pleased him.

"Oh dear, how tiresome! I've brought you the wrong pipe." And then she went down on her hands and knees in an endeavour to gather up the tobacco that had escaped from the pouch. It was at that inappropriate moment he chose to say:

"I saw some one you know to-day."

"Some one I know, dear me! And who could that be? It couldn't have been father, could it? He hasn't been in this week."

Dennis, filling his pipe, not the one she had brought him, but his own immediate favourite that had been lying on the mantelpiece, was careful not to watch his wife's face:

"Roddy Ainsworth," he said, carelessly, as he struck a match. He became conscious of a sudden silence, and a sudden stillness. Mabel was habitually neither silent nor still. So he went on talking. The pipe didn't draw well, and he had to keep his eyes, and attention, on it.

"I daresay you remember him. One of the best lob bowlers the Club ever had; I must try and get him to join again. He came into the Gallery this afternoon. He has been abroad all these years. He asked after you."

It was impossible to associate romance or deep feeling with Mabel, gentle, conscientious Mabel. Yet Dennis at this moment was conscious of the same desire to put his arms about her, to comfort her, that he had felt five years before, when it had proved so fatal. She had not spoken, but he felt rather than heard, the catch in her voice, her struggle for self-control, her desire to speak naturally. Now he took a hurried glance at her, and her strange unusual flush reproached him; he looked away again, quickly, ashamed of having seen it. Poor Mabel! But how ridiculous! He remembered one or two of Roddy's anecdotes of his experiences, and he felt a rising disgust, difficult to analyse,

at the sentiment called love. That Mabel had not forgotten Roddy Ainsworth, that she still cared for the fellow, could not arouse in him any feeling approaching jealousy; his attitude toward Mabel made such a thing impossible. He was sorry for her, and a little disgusted; that was all.

"He wants your father to put up money for a theatre for him. He wants to go into management here, with a musical play he has brought back with him. He seems to have been very successful in the Colonies. I saw your father about it, for a moment, on my way home, he is coming round presently to talk it over. That fellow Merritt is dining with him."

Dennis's pipe drew badly. Mabel's flush had faded, and she looked pale.

"He asked after me?" she said, her voice a little strained and unsteady.

"Who, Roddy? Oh, yes! He wanted to come and see you, told me to tell you he hadn't forgotten how good you were over his accompaniments."

Dennis's disgust left him as he noted the flutter of her pulses, divined the uneven beating of her heart. What rot it all was! Yet he was sorry for her, and a little curious. Could Mabel feel deeply, and how deeply was she feeling? Dennis had sat through many confidences in his time; despising nevertheless the weakness that prompted them. And despising, was yet vaguely sorry in that he had never experienced the emotion of which they told. It seemed so impossible to him to feel as Ted did, as apparently Mabel did. Poor old Mabel! Did she want to see Roddy? What would happen? Surely she would note his theatricality, his perpetual egotism.

"I suppose now you are sorry you married me?" came out involuntarily To that at least Mabel would utter no cliché; there could be none of her phrases that fitted the occasion. But in that he wronged her.

"Oh, Dennis, how can you say such things! I'm sure we've always been very happy together."

Dennis laughed.

"Of course, I was only joking. You'd got over it before we were married, hadn't you?"

"What nonsense! Got over it? I don't know what you're talking about."

If her lips trembled her speech was unchanged.

"We were good friends. Roddy and I were very good friends. . . ."

"Only friends?"

Dennis had flung himself again into the easy chair. He thought a little banter would be the best way to restore her calm. "I thought it was more than that. I seem to remember. . . ."

"Oh! I do wish you wouldn't talk so," she said, quite breathless, "it was nothing, nothing at all. You oughtn't to remember, . . . there was nothing to remember . . ."

Of course he did not want to distress her, and it was obvious she was becoming distressed.

"Well, he wants to come and see you, that's all. He asked me where we lived. He hasn't altered much, only he's become quite the professional actor, talks nothing but shop, wears his hair long!"

He reached out for "Gwilt's Dictionary of Architecture," which was within reach of his arm. He even found his place and read a line or two, before he heard the door closing softly behind him. She had gone out of the room. He read on for a little time, but with a growing sense of impatience. He supposed it was his duty to go after her, to see what she was doing. He was feeling a little remorseful, yet he could not help feeling also that it was more than a little ridiculous. Love and Mabel! How absurd! They had been married five years! Surely long enough for her to have forgotten "that blighter." He was impatient of her

folly, even as he moved his long legs reluctantly from the chair and went off to find her.

Her bedroom door was locked, and when he called out to know if anything was wrong, her voice came to him muffled and almost incoherent. He made out that she said her neuralgia was very bad, it had come on suddenly. She hoped he didn't mind, but she had gone to bed.

He was glad that no further demand was to be made upon his tact or his sympathy, glad to be alone for once, able to read on without interruption, and without his conscience reproaching him for his unsociability, for being so poor a companion to her. But the impatience and the phrase "it is all such rot" came between him and "Shadows in Sciography." And then he caught himself wondering about love, and other fellows' lives, and was more restless than ever, until Amos Juxton was announced, filling in the background and the foreground, and the whole picture.

As he talked to Mabel's father, he was once again sorry for Mabel. She had no one's consideration. Amos was so entirely self-sufficient and self-sufficing. He not only filled the room when he entered, he filled the house. He asked after Mabel, of course, but he seemed to think it of no consequence that she had gone to bed with neuralgia. He brushed it aside, saying vaguely she "ought to take more exercise."

"Now about that theatrical Syndicate. Yes, whisky and soda. I'll mix it myself, please. And one of those Upmanns. I've got a match. You were saying . . ."

And he made himself comfortable in the chair on the other side of the fireplace, preparing to talk, affecting to listen.

For some inexplicable reason Dennis's sympathy with Mabel and resentment of her father's indifference to her absence, made him desirous that Roddy should have his chance. He determined he would try and give him a

helping hand. If Mabel liked him, why shouldn't he do him a good turn?

He put Roddy's case very carefully before Amos, and Amos spotted the weak points in it at once. Amos was used to dealing with plausible tales.

"We've only got his word about the play, and we've only got his word for his own successes, and fine voice. Who has heard him here? Who's putting up the other three thousand? What sort of press notices has he got?"

"Very fine Colonial and American notices, he says."

"I daresay. But that's very little good to us."

Yet even whilst he was pouring out cold water, and finding every reason why he should neither finance the actor, nor his play, Dennis became conscious that Amos was bringing forward objections only that they should be overthrown. He was not really negativing the proposition, he was only altering its provisions. It became obvious to Dennis that his father-in-law was very much attracted by the thought of seeing himself as the lessee of a theatre. This was what Amos saw himself, not merely as a shareholder in a Syndicate.

"The 'Kemble' now, he told you the 'Kemble' was vacant, did he? What's the rent of it, or could it be bought outright? I should have to find that out; whether one could buy. I'd rather buy, that is if I went in for it at all. About young Ainsworth? I recollect his father well, a very good dentist but no business ability, no business ability at all. He stopped these. . . ." Amos opened his mouth and champed his teeth together to show how serviceable they were. "That's ten years ago, and I've never had pain nor ache, and only three eighteen altogether If I go into this affair, young Ainsworth mustn't expect it's only to put up his play. What did you say was the name of the play? 'Charles Auchester'! Well, that's not a very taking name. There's nothing very clever about that. 'The Girl from the

Orchestra' would be better. I know what they want, Dennis, my boy, I've always known what the public want, that's the secret of my success. . . ."

Amos grew more and more mellow, and confidential. This was no new idea to him, he told Dennis, this idea of taking a theatre, and running it himself. He didn't say the 'Kemble' would suit him, and he didn't say it wouldn't. A great deal depended on whether the bars were free. As for young Ainsworth, the dentist's son, he would have a look at the play, and he'd have to hear him sing. Amos really seemed to swell with complacency as he figured himself as a dramatic critic, musical expert, connoisseur of plays.

It only gradually became clear to Dennis Passiful that it was another man's game he was playing, that it had been Cosmo Merritt's clever fingers that had moulded Amos Juxton's plastic vanity until it had taken this form. Cosmo had obviously been working on him for many months to this end. Roddy Ainsworth, and "Charles Auchester," and the "Kemble" theatre, were all extraneous to the real issue.

"It's curious your coming to me to-day about taking the 'Kemble' theatre. As you say, I've had it in my mind some time. What a fuss they make about this writing, my boy! Now I'll tell you something nobody else knows, not a soul. I've written a book myself. What do you think of that? And it will be published next month. That takes your breath away, doesn't it? 'The Tale and the Typewriter'; that's something like a title. It was Merritt put me up to it. I must say he's a clever fellow. I never thought anything at all about the story I told him, until he came to me with it written out. It was just something that happened in the ordinary way of business, a trade secret got from a typewriting girl, by a man who has had wind of it, and made love to her on purpose. Merritt had just written in a few characters, but it is *my* story, there was no

doubt about that; it was as plain as a pike-staff. And she *had* red hair, though I don't recollect telling him so. It's coming out under both our names; that's only fair 'By Amos Juxton and Cosmo Merritt.' And now I'm coming to the point. He says there's a play in it, a fine play. He was talking to-night about the difficulty of getting a West End Manager to put up a play by a new author. I said I didn't think that would hold good with an advertiser like me. I could see about the notices. You know what I spend a year on the newspapers. But he said that wasn't the point, there were vested interests. I'm coming to it, don't hurry me . . .

"Well! I'm not going to anybody hat in hand. If I write a play, my boy, I can put up the play." For by now he thought he had not only written the story, but the play that grew out of it. "And I'll engage what actors and what actresses I please. Always supposing the bars are free. There's money in it, boy, take my word for it, there's money in a well-managed theatre. Those failures we see are all due to the actor-manager element. A man sees himself strutting about in a part. He doesn't stop to think what sort of a play it is."

It was a little discouraging to find how very subordinate Roddy and "Charles Auchester" had become. With infinite difficulty at last Dennis got some sort of promise from Amos that if he took the "Kemble," and he liked the play, and thought well of Roddy's voice, he might put up "Charles Auchester" as a stop gap, until "The Tale and the Typewriter" was ready.

"But, mind you, don't let him run away with the idea that salaries are going to swamp the profits. If I go in for a thing it's got to pay. . . . God bless me! It's twelve o'clock. Here have I been talking away and forgetting the time. You find out about the bars for me, or I'll talk it over with Merritt. He'll be on the telephone in a day or

two. He's going to share expenses with Ted in that new house of his in Grosvenor Street. What the boy wants with a West End house at that rent, I can't imagine . . ."

But Dennis could see Amos was rather pleased at the figure his son was going to cut, and that he had so much enterprise.

"He don't earn his income, and if he did his income wouldn't cover his expenses. He's always overdrawn. But *she's* got her head screwed on the right way. It was her idea that Merritt should keep house with them. Lord Loughborough has just come up to London for the parliamentary season. His son is the other side in politics, they don't hit it off any too well. He's been a widower now for more than a year; he don't want a grown-up son living with him, disagreeing with him most of the time. He's got his widowed daughter there, and she's a handful by all accounts. But she'll call, they'll both call. I'm not a snob, Dennis, but there *is* something in Society when you've got money, and can afford it. I don't say Ted can, but *I* can. . . ."

Dennis was conscious of a sudden sense of fatigue. It was his father-in-law's habit to drop in once or twice a week like this, to see his daughter, and talk about himself. But Mabel was a good audience, and Dennis could often lose himself in his own thoughts whilst they talked. Amos had prolonged the *séance* to-night, and Dennis was conscious of nothing now but the desire that he would finish saying good-night, and go. Yet an uneasy sense of duty forced him unwillingly to the words.

"Do you think it wise, sir, do you think it quite wise that Merritt should go to Grosvenor Street? People might talk, might say . . ."

"That my name has no right on the title page?" Amos laughed. "Good of you to warn me, boy, you needn't have been afraid to bring it out," for he had noted Dennis's hesitation. "Let 'em, that's all. Let 'em. I'm pre-

pared. I've got documentary evidence, I wrote a bit of it down. . . ."

"I was not thinking of that. . . ."

But Amos was too full of himself and his schemes to press for what he had been thinking. And Dennis was tired, and a little uncertain of his ground.

When Amos had left he was glad he had said nothing, glad too that he had done his best for Roddy. He wondered as he locked up and put out the lights, and went up to his room, whether Mabel had fallen asleep, or was lying awake wishing she was still free, that she had never been married; if she were thinking of Roddy Ainsworth. And somehow the thought made him uncomfortable. He had meant to do so much for Mabel. His last waking thought was how little she had become to him, how little he had given her except tolerance.

CHAPTER VII

NEVERTHELESS Dennis must be acquitted of pure Quixotism. His life was at the moment unsatisfactory. For two consecutive years he had expected to be chosen for the "Gentlemen and Players." Now he thought seriously of giving up first-class cricket. He needed fresh interests, something to prevent him becoming introspective; there was a long winter before him. The M.C.C. were sending a team out to South Africa; and he wished he had been going with them. Privately, and in a way that made it possible, he had helped towards the expenses. Three of his best friends at the Club were going, and he knew he should miss them; they were all golfers. Small, who was captaining them, played scratch, and was always available on Sunday. He knew he would miss Small; and would have a 'rotten' autumn.

He did not want to spend his days in criticising Mabel's ways, in being impatient of them. Roddy Ainsworth and the theatrical atmosphere generally might supply a new stimulus to them all. Dennis had an instinct he was living in a narrow and contracted area. At present it was only instinct, but reason was behind it. The world of the theatre has a glamour and illusion for those who know nothing of it from behind the footlights. Dennis had a sense of excitement over the matter, a feeling that it would lead to something, to some change; they were all stagnating.

But there was no stagnation where Roddy was concerned. Dennis had no time to get out the figures, and Amos had had no opportunity of communicating with Cosmo Merritt,

before Roddy turned up again in Bond Street to urge his case, and the necessity for quick action.

"I tell you, Dennis, this play is going to draw all London. There are three big scenes. I suppose you know the book? The first is at the Academy with all the girls in their white dresses, and Seraphino, you know I play Seraphino, is singing for them. We've changed him, of course, from violinist and conductor into a vocalist. One of the papers said my voice was like an organ. Without swank I think I may say he's right. But you shall hear me yourself. There is a fine scene when the dying girl sings her swan song, and Seraphino from outside her balcony takes up the refrain. There's a dash of Romeo and Juliet about it, perhaps, but the music wakes it up; makes it new. Then there's the masked ball at the villa; moonlight and all that sort of thing; it wants a bit of stage managing, I can tell you. When will Amos decide? Hadn't I better open negotiations with the theatre people?"

It was difficult to make Roddy believe that Dennis had any more pressing business to occupy him.

"I did see Amos yesterday," he admitted, somewhat reluctantly. And as he expected, Roddy was eager to hear what had been said. He not only took hope from what Dennis told him, he was exultant with certainty as soon as he heard Amos was not absolutely averse to the idea of leasing or buying the "Kemble."

"You take as many shares as he'll let you have. I tell you it's going to be a big thing. Musical Comedy has about had its day, and serious drama, Ibsen, Shaw, and that sort of high-falutin, won't catch the same audience. Sentiment is what they want, or melodrama. Sentiment set to music is a 'cert'; and that's what this is. There's no comic element, nothing vulgar. Only let Amos say the word. I'll get together the prettiest girls in London for the chorus. My scene with Maria will flood the place with tears."

He brought all sorts of people into the Gallery to answer questions, or to give details. Mr. Dolland grew quite impatient of them, and of the atmosphere they imported. Roddy said he wasn't good at figures himself but "Mr. Hart" or "Mr. Nathan" or "Mr. Berman," as the case might be, would tell Dennis what he wanted to know, or what Amos wanted to know. Dennis ascertained the ground rent of the "Kemble," and the multifarious interests that were involved, under what conditions the bars would be free, and who had to be bought out, or "taken in." The cost of the production was worked out, and a tentative salary list produced. Roddy did nothing himself, except talk; but he knew the right people, the practical people; he was sure about that, extravagantly eulogising to their faces each new importation. They never contradicted him, these geniuses of the under world. The whole machinery could be set in motion if the motive power were there, the motive power being Amos Juxton's money. Certainly before the week was out, carried a little off his feet by the other's impetuosity, Dennis was beginning to look upon the production of "Charles Auchester" as one of the things that was sure to happen. A slight hitch, however, in the negotiations for the theatre gave opportune pause. It should have been free at the end of the run of "Moonrise"; and "Moonrise" had looked like rising on a frost within a week of the opening. That is what Roddy had meant when he said the theatre was in the market. But theatrical events had once more surprised critics and box office, the piece had caught on to a certain extent, sufficiently anyway to warrant a limited extension of the lease to the present occupier.

"It's only a flash in the pan, it's not real business, only stalls and dress circle. It's Connie Lander drawing them. Connie Lander will come to us when we're ready. I played with her two years ago in 'Frisco.' . . ."

But there was no doubt Roddy was disappointed and a little cast down at the delay. He had taken for granted that the money would be forthcoming, and that the theatre was not was a blow. He came every day to the Bond Street Gallery, making Dennis his confidant, incidentally exhibiting himself as the supreme egoist.

"I shall have to find something, temporarily. I hate sponging on you."

If he hated it, he disguised his feeling very well, accepting daily lunch, borrowing a tenner, or twenty-five, going to Dennis's tailor for his clothes, and to Dennis's hatter, making free with his name and credit.

He told Dennis stories of women, boasted a little of his own successes. Dennis did not appreciate these stories, thought many of them abominable, in fact. Yet imperceptibly they affected him, keeping him interested, stirring in him some emotion for which he had no name. He never approved, but he always listened. He forgot about the red lacquer cabinet, which changed hands without his intervention, and went for a song. He neglected Christie's, and the masterpieces on the walls of his Gallery received no addition, whilst day after day he sat in his office, listening to Roddy's amorous and other adventures, becoming intimately acquainted with the affairs of the "Kemble" theatre, even going out to lunch at Roddy's invitation with the very Connie Lander who was responsible for the strange feverish popularity of "Moonrise."

It was Roddy's lunch party, Dennis had never taken an actress out to lunch. Connie became very fascinated by Dennis before the meal was over, and in the manner of ladies of her profession, with a dash of American accent to excuse her boldness, she suggested he should ask her to supper one evening. The supper party actually took place, for Roddy had been enthusiastic at the suggestion, adding himself to the party as a matter of course. He took all the trouble of

it off Dennis's hands. Connie brought a friend on the eventful occasion, with peroxide hair, and large ingenuous blue eyes. That made a *partie carrée*, and Dennis was amazed at the amount of champagne the ladies absorbed, and at the liveliness of their conversation.

Nevertheless he found himself yawning before the evening was over, and was quite glad that a paternal government decreed that no one should sup after twelve o'clock. There was so much of the talk that he did not understand, or in which he took no interest. Afterwards he knew he should have made himself aware of all the parts Connie Lander had ever played, and been able to answer intelligently when she questioned him as to how he thought this or that had 'gone,' how she looked as "Thaïs," or "Zenda, the Pride of the Pyramids," and whether her songs had suited her. She was certainly disappointed in him. She told Roddy afterwards that his friend "didn't seem to have much gumption, there was no go in him." Roddy admitted Dennis had the reputation in the Club of being somewhat of a prig, but "a good fellow for all that," he added: "one of the best."

There was another lunch party, and tea in Miss Lander's flat, but Connie made no progress with her wooing. Dennis may have been interested, but he was certainly not enterprising. He was really experimenting with himself, and the experiment proved a failure. He thought her vulgar and meretricious; in the end he thought worse of her than that.

It had been a strange bewildering week, but Mabel had gained by it, gained decidedly in comparison. Each evening he went home meaning to tell her all about it and that he was seeing Roddy Ainsworth daily; principally he meant to tell her that he was seeing Roddy Ainsworth daily. But there never seemed to be an opening.

Mabel complained more than usual about her neuralgia, and seemed nervously to avoid conversation with him, talking sometimes spasmodically and inconsequently about her

painting or household matters, but with unusual intervals of silence. She looked ill, and Dennis was sorry for her; believing she was suffering. He could criticise, but could not analyse. Everything seemed suddenly to have altered in his way of regarding life, and to have become complex instead of simple. He began to wonder sometimes if marriage had been more satisfying to Mabel than to himself, to doubt it. He thought he detected something apologetic in her manner and feeble vehemence of interpolated talk. Now he wanted her to meet Roddy, anticipating her disillusionment. He had a spasm of self-reproach after the termination of his short-lived acquaintance with Connie Lander, and bought Mabel a Louis Seize pendant, a pretty fragile thing that had caught his eye in a sale room. In expressing her admiration and gratitude, she tried to say something else to him, but burst into tears and rushed from the room. He was indefinably irritated, and when they met again, he made another effort to bring in Roddy Ainsworth's name. He felt he was keeping them apart, but quite without intention. On the contrary, he wished them to meet.

Roddy himself cut the Gordian knot, and in the simplest way. He sauntered into the Gallery one day, as usual, but found Dennis in earnest conversation with a little grey gentleman with side whiskers and gold eyeglasses. Impressively one of the assistants came forward and whispered to Roddy that it was Lord Rosenstein, and that Mr. Passiful must not be interrupted.

"How long is he likely to keep him?" Roddy asked impatiently.

"There is no saying, sir. Lord Rosenstein generally goes round the Gallery when he comes in. Sometimes Mr. Passiful goes out with him. If there is any message . . ."

"Tell him I've got the score of the music at last. I want him to hear it, and Mr. Juxton. . . ."

Roddy was really annoyed to think that Lord Rosenstein, or anybody else, should stand between him and his desires, him and his intentions. Dennis found a moment to come over to him and say quietly:

"Sorry, Ainsworth, I can't get away just now, he doesn't like to be left."

Roddy seized the moment and the lapel of his coat:

"But I say, I've got the score of the music. I want Juxton to hear it. Can't I get at him, or at Mabel? I must have some one to play it for me. I want to see Mabel again. It isn't everybody could play these songs. You've never given me your address."

Dennis gave it, hurriedly.

"Yes, go and see Mabel, by all means. I don't know whether you'll find her at home. Go into the office, ask over the telephone."

Mabel must be warned, prepared. But Lord Rosenstein was not a customer who could be ignored, or kept waiting. Dennis went back to him, composing his mind to listen whilst that famous collector gave his view of the new "Duchess of Devonshire," and the old, or perhaps renaissance, Venus with the Cestus, of Bode and the Lucas bust. Lord Rosenstein revelled in art gossip as women in bargain sales. But no picture dealer could afford to cut short his garrulity. Dennis kept that in mind, even if only part of his intelligence was present, and the rest occupied in wondering whether Roddy would find Mabel altered; and what Mabel would think of Roddy.

It was characteristic of Roddy to have entirely forgotten how he and Mabel had last parted, of anything the girl might have suffered.

Dennis could not leave Lord Rosenstein again, and the latter maundered on through all that interminable afternoon. He did, however, find time to ask his assistant:

"Did Mr. Ainsworth get through to Hamilton Terrace?"

"Yes, sir, I think so, sir. He said he was going straight up there. He had the music with him."

But any anxiety Dennis had felt on Mabel's behalf was set at rest, before he had been home ten minutes. Roddy's visit seemed to have had the effect of loosening Mabel's tongue, and restoring her to her habitual volubility.

"It was so kind and thoughtful of him to telephone me. I was just back from Church Row. Ursula has a cold, and I thought perhaps I could read her something of Mrs. Eddy's. She has only got to think she hasn't a cold, you know. But she sneezed so much, poor thing, it was difficult to persuade her. Agatha, who never sneezed at all, thought it all so wonderful. But of course she has no cold to commence with, which made it so much easier. When I came home the telephone was actually ringing. So I changed into my brown . . ."

But it was about the interview Dennis wanted to hear, and as soon as he could get a word in edgeways he asked:

"Did you find Ainsworth altered?"

At that her colour changed a little.

"No! I don't know. He, he is . . . older."

She faltered a little, then took courage; her courage was a poor thing, but it affected Dennis, who avoided looking at her, and moved about the room as if searching for something that interested him more than her answer to his question, which now he felt had been unkind, almost brutal, like the probing of a wound.

"I say, where's that book I left here last night, the one I was reading?"

But having found her courage, the flush coming and going in her sallow cheek, she went on more bravely, and without stumbling.

"I thought I did not want to see him, but it all came so suddenly. And I was agitated, and then so pleased. It was like old times. You don't mind, do you? He wants to

see me again, often. He wants me to take up my music. You see we were friends for so long. When you were at Harrow he was still at home, going to a day school. His father was our dentist, and they were quite poor. I wonder if you remember, you did not know him until after that, did you? Roddy would not have had music lessons at all but for me. He said so himself to-day. He had such a beautiful boy's voice, like you hear in a Cathedral. He sang duets with me sometimes . . ."

She stopped short. "You don't mind?" she said again, confused.

"Mind? What should I mind? He's an egoistical braggart, and in time I should think you'd find him a bore." To avoid her eyes and give the conversation the lightest possible tone seemed the kindest thing to do in the face of her obvious agitation.

Dennis had never cared enough for any woman to be agitated about her. Mabel's attitude about Roddy Ainsworth inspired him with an unwilling interest; a little contemptuous. He thought of the stories Roddy had told him of women who had offered themselves to him. Not but what he knew his wife's timorous modesty, it was that which had originally attracted him to her. He was vexed, even if he did not admit it to himself, that she should be agitated or engrossed in Roddy Ainsworth; it was incongruous in her, and he liked to think of her as unvarying. Dennis wanted married life made easy. Nevertheless he would not thwart or influence Mabel. She must do what she liked.

"Have him here as often as you like. It will relieve me. He has been sitting about in the Gallery all the week, interrupting business. I suppose you know he wants your father to put up money for him, to take a theatre?"

"Oh, yes! It would be so nice if he did. Roddy wants me to play some of the score to him. It is such a pity I've let my music get rusty. He was quite vexed once or twice

to-day, and that made me worse. And the accompaniments to the solos are so difficult. But I wanted you to know all about it before I began to practise. I'll finish painting the new poppy piece for the dinner table first. I am not going to neglect any of my duties. But he said he never had had an accompanist that suited him like I did. He means to take up a great deal of my time. Dennis, you are sure you don't mind?"

Her anxiety to be of use to Roddy was obvious, yet at the same time she would not rob her husband of any of his due. She was loyal and good all through, if inept. And again he wondered if marriage had brought her much more than it had him, or if her vapid continuity of talk covered the same emptiness as his silences.

"I'm very glad if he gives you a new interest in life, something to think about. He might cure you of Christian Science."

"Oh, dear, yes! He met some of them in America. Such dreadful stories he told me of their untruths, and how keen they were for money. I'm sure I shall never read Mrs. Eddy's book again." She hastened to reassure him. But then pulled herself up to say that she would never have pursued her studies in Christian Science if she had thought that Dennis objected.

Dennis said, rather brutally, that it was better than Female Suffrage. After that he was permitted to read in peace for a while, and Mabel stole away to her studio, where she started the assiduous practising that Roddy had urged upon her.

Dennis, for the next few days, had his office to himself. The scene of Roddy's eloquence was transferred to Hamilton Terrace, where practising went on from early morn till dewy eve.

And there, one day, to Fanny's astonishment, quickly changed to suspicion, she was actually denied admission!

"Mrs. Passiful is not to be disturbed," Mary said.

"But is she alone . . . who is with her?"

Fanny heard that Mr. Ainsworth was with her, they were practising together. Fanny was altogether astonished, irritated, and curious. She talked about it to Cosmo, who laughed and said he should think Mabel was quite safe.

Mabel, unconscious of Fanny's comments, was yet vexed to hear that she had been turned from the door. Mabel was absorbed in the music of the new play, and in working to prepare it for her father's acceptance. It was quite a little conspiracy that was hatching, whereby Amos was to be forced into hearing what neither Mabel nor Roddy had any doubt would secure his support. Interruption would have been fatal to these rehearsals. It was Roddy who instructed Mary, and was liberal to her. If he had borrowed money from Dennis, no one could say he hoarded it. Mabel was dreadfully afraid lest Fanny had been offended, she knew how sensitive Fanny was.

Meanwhile, "The Tale and the Typewriter," by Amos Juxton and Cosmo Merritt, appeared and was received with that spurious admiration by the press that every big advertiser can command, and that presents the semblance of success to a happy amateur author. The reviewers might have had their tongues in their cheek when they spoke of "The Tale and the Typewriter" as a masterpiece of invention and technique, proving talent of an unusual degree, almost amounting to genius in its sublimer passages of passion and poetry. Cosmo had many influential friends, and "Juxton's" took full pages all the year round. Amos never saw the tongue thrust into cheek, it was the other side he noted with exultation, smooth and smiling. There was no question but that the book must be dramatised, and the "Kemble" secured as soon as it was vacant. Amos's good humour overflowed, and effervesced in those days. Fanny secured an extra cheque for new furniture. If the bulk of

it went in clothes with which to astonish Crockford's no one was any wiser, nor worse. Mabel's request for a hearing for "Charles Auchester" found easy assent. Time and place were quickly arranged. It was customary for Dennis and Mabel, Ted and Fanny, to dine every Sunday with Amos at Fitzjohn's Hall.

"You bring your music, and the young man to sing it, the Sunday after next. I'll have Merritt there to give his opinion. I'm not saying I'm going to take the theatre, nor what I'm going to produce there when I have got it. 'The Tale and the Typewriter' isn't ready. Mr. Merritt and I are not satisfied with the lyrics, and we haven't decided on a composer. I'll hear the young fellow's songs, or what of them you've got ready to play to me. Don't let him build too much on it, that's all."

It was not in Mabel to try and nobble Fanny, nor to realise the advisability of so doing. But her conscience reproaching her that she had said she was "out" when she was at home, she wrote inviting her to lunch, to meet Mr. Ainsworth, and she added a timid hope that she would be able to stay for half an hour or so afterwards, and listen to the new musical melodrama.

Fanny accepted Mabel's invitation; she was a practical "free fooder," always ready to lunch or dine out with anybody, anywhere, to avoid the mere chance of domesticity, or *tête-à-tête* with Ted.

She also wished to see the man who had been "closeted with Mabel." She had little doubt of the result. Fanny's vanity was quite a unique thing, she really thought she was irresistible. When any man failed to give her a due meed of admiration, she found him "weird," or "quite uncanny," "quaint," or "not only impossible but improbable." She had now quite a few phrases culled from Cosmo, that gave her an air of smartness.

But the entertainment, if the luncheon party was to be

considered in that light, proved something of a fiasco. After a few *œillades*, to which the "weird looking actor" proved himself completely indifferent, Fanny would talk of nothing but Crockford's, boasting in her languid and indifferent way of the aristocrats who played cards there, and of what each and all of them had said about Miss Jones. From Fanny's conversation it appeared that there was no other subject discussed at the Club but Miss Jones, her dress, manners, appearance, and the Scotch Baronet who was supposed to be enamoured of her, but of whom Fanny obviously thought better things. Now Roddy Ainsworth had no sort of interest in Miss Jones, nor, be it admitted, in anybody but Roddy Ainsworth, and incidentally "Charles Auchester." Mabel tried to please both of them, wandering from Miss Jones to Maria, and Seraphino to Fanny's new frock, with a nervous desire to please both her guests, and place them *en rapport*. But failure resulted, as was perhaps inevitable.

Fanny had not nice table manners. She crumbled her bread, picked at the food on her plate, mixed it up with her fork, and left it uneaten; declaring she had no appetite, and only cared for pickles and salted almonds. When her want of appetite, and love of pickles, excited no attention from Roddy, she said to Mabel that she had a most terrible headache, she didn't believe she *could* listen to music. Her head became worse as Roddy showed more and more familiarity with Mabel, urging on her the necessity of becoming completely acquainted with the whole score of "Charles Auchester" before Sunday, and reproaching her with want of spirit in it. When Fanny had cracked a filbert with her pretty white teeth, and Roddy had ignored the performance, it became obvious, even to Mabel, that all hope of harmony between her guests was over. Fanny — still talking about Miss Jones and the Club — left quite early, and fortunately the afternoon became free for further practice.

Before the time for Amos to pronounce a verdict had arrived, Dennis grew sick of hearing fragments of the "Charles Auchester" score, and of being regaled with tit bits of the dialogue, and the words of the songs. Mabel could think and talk of nothing else, speculating as to what her father would say of this, that, or the other number, half elated at the importance of her position in the matter, desperately nervous lest she should break down at a critical moment, spoiling Roddy's effects, or incurring his just anger.

It seemed to Dennis, watching, that Mabel had forgotten all her sufferings on Roddy's account, all her fears of meeting him again, her doubts and tremors. She was singularly happy and occupied, younger looking than when she had married; the short-sighted eyes were very soft, and bluer than he had noticed them. She talked less, hardly at all of anything but the play.

Dennis saw his father-in-law once during this week. He came into the Gallery with a bundle of press cuttings that he thought Dennis might care to see. There was one headed "The Playtime of Famous Men," which Amos pooh-poohed, but was careful Dennis should not miss a word.

He swelled visibly whilst Dennis was reading the article, saying how much he deprecated that kind of thing.

It was illustrated with Amos's portrait, and there was another one of the interior of his library. Amos "could not think" where they had been obtained. That to which he wanted to draw Dennis's attention, however, was a curious coincidence, a phrase. The article said that "Amos Juxton supplied the people with food, but there was other than material food, for which the populace was hungering! There was no doubt he could supply that also if he would."

Cosmo Merritt knew his man, and that a sense of humour was not his strong point. The article laid the butter on a little thick, perhaps, and Amos had a buttered look; Dennis noticed it.

"It was to that I wanted to draw your attention. Curious, isn't it, that line? It's true, you know, in a sense. They want good fiction as well as good food. And then there is the theatre, it's a great educator, Dennis. I wouldn't have anything but what a mother could bring her girl to see, no innuendo, or anything of that sort. The programmes could be interleaved with 'Juxton's quick supper' scheme, and a nice tea served between the acts, made fresh. China tea, mind you, not that Indian stuff you get now, stewed, half cold. Not that I've made up my mind, only I thought you'd like to see what the papers were saying."

Amos had always loved seeing his name in print, but sometimes he had resented the terms. Every notice of his book seemed indirect or gratuitous advertisement, and gratified him as a business man, as well as a great *raconteur*. His appetite grew by what it fed on, and in imagination he saw his theatre as a great advertising medium for "Juxton's," with himself hailed as the great benefactor of the age.

"Clean plays, great moral plays, my boy, that's what they want. I shouldn't mind losing money over them either, if I felt sure I was doing good, giving them other than material food." He quoted the sentence with great complacence; it seemed to fit his circumstance so admirably.

Dennis could only marvel at his father-in-law's obtuseness, and at Cosmo's adroitness. For himself he was pledged to give Roddy his chance. And not for the world would he have driven from Mabel's face that new young look of happiness, nor quenched the eagerness with which she waited for her father's decision. If Dennis wondered sometimes if he had been everything a husband should be to Mabel, he was at least more than her friend. He was becoming more critical altogether, of himself as well as of his wife. And his intelligence made him a good critic. If ever he began to think, he would think clearly; but of

course, when his leg got all right again he would have no time for thinking. Mabel was a giver, but there had been no gift he wanted from her. She was blossoming in Roddy Ainsworth's need; that was what he thought now.

The momentous Sunday arrived at last. Punctually at eight o'clock Amos was airing his enormous width before the fire-place in the drawing-room of Fitzjohn's Hall. His white waistcoat accentuated his size. The guests arrived almost simultaneously. It was known that punctuality was one of his hobbies, and most of those who were present were bent one way or another on propitiating him.

"Well, here we all are!" he exclaimed with satisfaction, when Mr. and Mrs. Ted Juxton, Mr. and Mrs. Dennis Passiful, Mr. Cosmo Merritt, and Mr. Ainsworth, had been definitely and separately announced by the butler with the assistance of two liveried footmen.

"You two are the only strangers." He indicated Roddy to Cosmo. The two were immediately conscious of antipathy. Cosmo regarded Roddy's long hair with disfavour, and found his collar too low. Roddy was almost too much occupied with himself to be censorious, but Cosmo's eyeglass, held in its place without visible support, seemed somewhat offensive. In a way, too, it had been conveyed to him that Cosmo was the arbiter of his destinies. Amos being the moneyed man, this seemed unfair. Also, notwithstanding the press notices of which he had boasted, Roddy distrusted journalists, not quite without cause. Policemen and cabmen have the same feeling towards each other.

"This is a family meeting, Mr. Ainsworth. Sunday is the day for the family! I've always said it, and I always shall. I've made an exception in your favour to-night, for I look upon Mr. Merritt as practically one of the family, seeing that now he occupies the same house. I remember you, young fellow," he went on, talking to Roddy, "when you were almost no height. Many a

trick your father performed on my teeth. We were a regular income to him. There was Mabel with a plate, and Ted with toothache, and as for me. . . ." Again he opened his mouth and showed his golden molars. "Good work, eh? Your father did good work. We'll see presently of what his son is capable. But dinner is on the table. You take in Mabel. I remember when you were always running after Mabel, never out of the house. She found a better match for herself, eh?"

But now dinner was announced and they all followed Amos into the dining-room. On such occasions Amos put on company manners, and offered Fanny his arm. Fanny was still *persona grata* with her father-in-law, although she had not, as a rule, the gift of retaining her friends. It was only Cosmo Merritt who, after five years, appeared to be faithful to her. Their alliance however was offensive and defensive, a curious thing, not explicable on ordinary grounds.

It was Mabel who sat at her father's left hand. Her marriage was entirely satisfactory; Amos Juxton liked Dennis as well as any man he knew, better than most in fact. Some quality of candour or simplicity in the young man, his complete honesty, perhaps his belief in that of other people, had endeared him to his father-in-law. Amos was curiously proud of Dennis, too, and Mabel shared the favour with which he regarded his son-in-law.

Ted on the other hand was never anything but a vexation. Once he had been ambitious for Ted, but he had had no satisfaction in his ambitions; now he found fault with him continually. Yet Cosmo, who was a good observer, especially when his own interests were concerned, held the opinion, notwithstanding Amos's constant fault-finding with his son, and the way he habitually spoke of, and to, him, that Ted was really the innermost core of Amos's heart, and that his censoriousness was a cloak for a feeling

of which, because he could not be proud, he was a little ashamed.

But whichever of his children he loved, or whether he loved either of them, he was equally tactful in his conversation. Having made his observation about Roddy running after Mabel, and implied that Mabel had thrown him over for Dennis, he turned his attention to Ted, and began to chaff him about his clothes. His clothes and his wife were Ted's sensitive points. Before the soup was finished, and Amos gulped it down with strange noises, his serviette tucked under his collar, he had touched on both.

Ted was heavily built, his hair grew low on his forehead, and his clean shaven face was rugged and sullen. He had coarse hands and big feet, he slouched in his carriage, slunk through life, speaking but little. Fanny had laughed at him so often for what he said, or left unsaid, exposed his uncouthness to him so ruthlessly, that now he had little self-respect left. His brain power was perhaps a little below the normal, the fist was his only idea of a repartee. But Cosmo always told him that a man should consider his appearance, and in that Fanny agreed with him. It was under Cosmo's advice that Ted's dress clothes came from the best tailor in London. His shirts were soft, and of the latest fashion, his jewelled waistcoat buttons, four of them in the long pointed double breasted garment that was the "dernier cri" in "Modes for Men," matched the sleeve links, and toned with his studs. He, too, had lately taken to carrying an eyeglass. It was his misfortune that it would not keep in position as Cosmo's did. But placing and replacing it served him with an occupation, and his father with the opportunity for satire, of which he availed himself freely.

"Try Stickphast, Ted," he said now, looking up from his soup, "or train Fanny to hold it in for you. She's an obedient wife, I take it, and wouldn't go back on you."

Ted's short hoarse laugh was the only answer to the gibe, but Fanny, who had little sense of humour, remarked, "I see myself doing it," with a toss of her head.

It was strange that at Amos Juxton's house one dined better than at any of those he served. Since his children were married, he had discarded the Communal system. He said it was only truly economical for a family. He had his own *chef* and kitchen-maids, his portentous butler, so much like himself in build, the footmen and a full establishment. There was perhaps a lack of elegance about the repast, consisting as it did of mulligatawny soup, boiled turbot, roast beef with Yorkshire pudding, and a baked treacle tart. The menu varied but slightly from year's end to year's end. Salmon was sometimes substituted for turbot, the mulligatawny was occasionally replaced with ox tail, and exceptionally with turtle. The vegetables followed the seasons. In the summer, instead of the treacle, there were gooseberries, cherries, or currants for the pudding. It was not elegant, but all the materials were of the very best. It had been difficult to train a French chef to Amos's tastes; a German compromise, instructed by Juxton's, finally solved the problem. Amos liked his guests to eat heartily, and it was with difficulty always that he condoned Fanny's conduct at meals.

The silver on the table was bright and there were flowers in specimen glasses. Nothing was lacking but good humour. Fanny and Ted had been quarrelling all day. It had ended as usual in Ted giving in on every point, and Fanny sulking because he had not done so before.

Fanny was dressed in white, and Mabel in a new orange-coloured charmeuse trimmed with oriental embroidery. Fanny found time to admire it before they left the drawing-room. And Cosmo had regarded it with interest. Mabel did not know that Cosmo's interest was due to Fanny's admiration. He knew there must be something singularly

unbecoming or hideous about a fellow-woman's dress if Fanny admired it. And truly the orange hue was unfortunate for Mabel's complexion. But Mabel was pleased with Fanny's praise and showed at her best, as soon as she had recovered from her father's observation. She admired her father very much, but his jocosity had always been a terror to her and Ted. It provided Cosmo with an aphorism which, however, he had not yet put into polished form. "The funny man has rarely a sense of humour" expressed it but dully. Margaret Lemon, to whom he was in the habit of taking his best things, had told him that it was feeble.

Cosmo made no effort to shine at this family dinner-party. Observant silence was his attitude. And Fanny, as always, kept him amused. Whatever their relations, and the whole of Hampstead was exercised over the matter, he had certainly no illusions about her; and she may have been madly in love with him, popular opinion said that she was, but it did not prevent her from making uncomplimentary remarks to him in public, though certainly they were made in a flirtatious way; but the flirtatious way was the only way Fanny knew of talking to any man who was not her husband. "Cosmo, I hate you," accompanied by a shrug or an *œillade*, was one of her favourite phrases. She often accused him of meanness, and gave instances that failed to prove it. If Ted, however, dared to agree in any attack she might make on Cosmo, she would turn upon him furiously and say unthinkable things; but not in her father-in-law's presence. Amos exercised some restraining influence over her. She behaved better towards Ted when Amos was present than at any other time. It was a sad spectacle, nevertheless, to see the two together, and to notice how little of the man there was left in Ted after six years of married life to a girl whom he loved, and who was dependent upon him for the very bread she ate. But her

nature knew no gratitude, and her heart no softness. Dennis suspected more than he knew, seeing the demoralisation of Ted's character. He was, however, as yet far from realising her completely, and often thought Ted might have managed her better, exercised more control over her. He also blamed him for a violent temper that gave Fanny excuse for much that she said and did. She pretended to be frightened of her personal safety, and had more than once said if it had not been for Cosmo, and his influence over Ted, she could not have gone on living with him. Her attitude to-night, for instance, was one of dejection.

"Ted's been simply intolerable, all day," she said to Mabel. And, of course, poor Ted heard it, as had been meant. The only offence of which he was conscious was having asked her to go for a walk in the Park with him.

"One would think Ted had been beating you," Amos said jocosely. The swimming eyes she turned on him, and then away, almost admitted the charge. But Cosmo laughed, and the growl from Ted seemed to be directed more at him for laughing than against Fanny for implying the correctness of his father's guess.

If there had been any stranger present but Roddy Ainsworth, who obviously was not worth powder and shot, Fanny might have revived. But Roddy could talk nothing but "Charles Auchester" and the "Kemble," the run of "Moonrise," and a short engagement he had just been offered, to play Oliver Orchard's part in "The Girl from Galway," whilst that eminent comedian was "resting," after a severe attack of professional jealousy. He had an idea that everyone at the table wanted to hear what he had to say. And perhaps that was well. For Amos had a habit of becoming absorbed in his food, and no one else was conversationally inclined.

Cosmo was interested in seeing what form Fanny's ill-temper would take. He really understood her so much

better than anyone else. He knew she would be unable to bear Amos's kindness to Mabel, Mabel's evident happiness and pride in her pupil or protégé. Mabel was looking young, almost nice-looking, to-night, notwithstanding her unbecoming dress. It was not given to Fanny to see another woman's happiness with equanimity, from whatever source.

"I should think the play would go to pieces without Oliver Orchard," Fanny said.

"Come and see me take his part," Roddy said good-humouredly.

"But I hear the booking has fallen off altogether since the public have known he is out of the bill."

What Fanny had heard, and what Fanny invented, were often the same thing; but she could not get through Roddy Ainsworth's thick skin.

"They don't know I'm in it yet. The announcement will be made to-morrow. I shouldn't be surprised if there was quite a fresh boom given to the play. They are going to ask the Press when I've sung myself in, make a regular first night of it. You ought all to come. Won't you, sir?" he asked Amos.

She could not hurt Roddy, so she put out a little spiteful paw with which to claw poor Ted. Ted jumped when she addressed him, although it had only been to ask him to pass her a salted almond, she said it was the only thing she fancied. The eyeglass figured again, it dropped into the treacle tart. The incident might have been ignored, if Fanny had not drawn the attention of the whole table to it by her malicious laugh, by repeating Amos's witticism, and saying the "Stickphast" had better be brought down; it was such a pity he should use the treacle.

"You shut up."

Ted grew red, and there was a little passage of arms between the husband and wife, not very edifying. Dennis

saw how Fanny's malicious laugh had exasperated Ted, how his sensitiveness wilted under her ridicule. It is possible Cosmo saw it, too, and was amused, for such things amused him. But he covered it up by entering languidly into the conversation with an anecdote about Oliver Orchard and the prima donna, under cover of which Ted's red face, and Fanny's satisfaction in having roused him, escaped Amos's attention. He was recommending Dennis to try a glass of port.

"You're too sober, my boy. You overdo it. That port cost me six-and-six a bottle in bond. . . ."

Mabel was sorry for Ted, and that the incident should have interrupted what Roddy was saying. But Roddy went on talking about himself, when Cosmo's anecdote was finished, quite unaffected.

When the ladies had left the room, things went a little better. Cosmo drew his chair up to Amos, and began to tell him what he had heard people saying about "The Tale and the Typewriter," and what a fine play it would make.

"I think I've found a librettist. As for the music . . ." Roddy dashed into this with another eulogy of the music of "Charles Auchester" and what a treat they were going to have presently, when Mabel ran through the score and he let them hear some of the songs.

Cosmo, notwithstanding his prejudice against long hair, was so anxious that Amos should take the "Kemble" as soon as it could be got, that he refrained from snubbing Roddy. It did not matter what they put on at first. Why not "Charles Auchester," since Dennis Passiful was backing it, and Dennis had his father-in-law's ear. The great thing was that Amos should have the house. Cosmo saw endless advantages to himself when Amos should be the lessee of the Kemble theatre. He knew the world quite well, into which the other was venturing as a novice; he had no fear of any influence Roddy Ainsworth might acquire; he knew the type,

and that its egotism swamped its interests. But for his constitutional inertia Cosmo Merritt would have been a great man, or a rich one. He could always see his opportunities; getting up early enough to take advantage of them was what generally beat him in the end. That he could not do. He put in just the right word at the right time, when Roddy's eloquence interfered with what was meant to be a private talk with Amos. Amos might listen to "Charles Auchester" and consider the author as a possible candidate for setting "The Tale and the Typewriter" to music. But Cosmo would see that Amos recognised Roddy as only "out for himself."

Dennis urged the merits of "Charles Auchester" temperately and tactfully. Ted was the only one who took no part in the conversation. The poor fellow was ashamed that he had lost his temper, sorry that he had spoken rudely to Fanny. He knew that he was always putting his foot into it, but she exasperated him and he resented his father's interference. He did not look sorry, he only looked sullen, and smoked aggressively, whilst the plays were under discussion, nursing his grievances.

"Well, you're sitting there as glum as if I'd given you underdone mutton," Amos said to him once. "Did you read 'The Tale and the Typewriter'? What do you make of it? Think your father can write as well as any of 'em, eh?"

"To tell you the honest truth, I couldn't get through it," Ted answered doggedly. "I like those stories of Jacobs."

Roddy knew enough to praise the "Tale and the Typewriter" sky high.

By the time the move was made into the drawing-room Amos had come to the conclusion that if "Charles Auchester" was good enough, he might open the season at the 'Kemble' with it. Renting or purchasing the 'Kemble' had been decided upon, although no one, except perhaps

Cosmo, knew how the decision had been reached. It had been reiterated again and again that "Charles Auchester" had drawn all America, and was therefore bound to draw at least half London.

"But we must hear Mr. Ainsworth's voice," Cosmo said in the hall. "We must assure ourselves of its calibre. His 'Seraphino,' as he tells us, may have satisfied New York, although I believe, correct me if I am wrong, that there were one or two dissentient opinions in the press — important dissentients. The London audience is so much more critical. We might be able to get Angell . . ."

This had the anticipated effect of angering Roddy. He had the option of the play, nobody but himself could put it up. Dennis held him back, almost with force.

"Let it go at that, Roddy. It's all right, can't you see it's all right? Merritt has a way of putting one's back up, it's his method, my sister-in-law taught it to him, I believe, but it doesn't mean anything. You can see for yourself that Mr. Juxton has quite decided upon becoming the lessee of the 'Kemble.' Isn't that good enough for you? He'll put up 'Charles Auchester' if you can sing him into a belief in it. Isn't that enough for one night?"

Dennis held Roddy back while he expostulated with him. He meant to see that he had fair play; he scarcely knew why, except that he was Mabel's old friend.

"That's true. My option won't expire for three months." Roddy was easily assuaged. "But fancy that monocled fool doubting my fitness to play lead. Do you think if I had not had the best tenor voice in England that Fowler would have recommended me to play Oliver Orchard's part, or that Edwards would have engaged me for it? He *heard* me, he didn't go on the recommendation alone. You see he'll offer me a permanent engagement. But that's not what I want."

"I know well enough what you want, and you'll get it,

too. But keep calm, don't quarrel with Merritt if you want Amos Juxton's ear or money. Come along."

In the drawing-room, Fanny, relapsed into depression, perched on the fender stool, her back rounded, a little hunched, was complaining of headache. Mabel had been sympathetically plying her with aspirin and advice. Whenever Mabel ceased to be sorry for Ted, she began to feel sorry for Fanny. The entrance of the men cut short her ministrations. Fanny revived when Cosmo joined her on the fender-stool. And Mabel, at Roddy's instigation, went at once to the piano.

Fanny, looking up from her low-toned conversation as Ted came in, said to him:

"I suppose you are going to tell us what *you* think of Mr. Ainsworth's voice." And then turning to Roddy, who was already arranging the music for Mabel on the stand, she added:

"Ted ought to be a good judge of voices. He hasn't missed a performance at a Music Hall for years. Lottie Collins is his favourite heroine in real life, and he simply raves about Malcolm Scott."

"And what's the matter with Malcolm Scott?" Ted put in.

"Nothing," she answered, smiling sweetly; her good humour suddenly restored. "Nothing, but this is serious music, isn't it?" She appealed prettily to Roddy.

"Oh, if it's serious music, I'm off. Come for a turn in the garden, Dennis, my father keeps his rooms so hot," Ted remarked.

Amos thought the room was very comfortable, but there was no pleasing Ted. Amos was already enthroned in his favourite easy chair, his coat was thrown open, he had his hands folded over his stomach, a favourite attitude. He looked the picture of well-fed benevolence, as he signalled to Mabel to begin.

Dennis followed Ted out of the room. He had done all

that was necessary, and already he was tired of hearing Mabel play snatches of the music from "Charles Auchester." The garden, even in the chill autumnal air, was more to his mind than the juxtaposition of those two on the fender-stool, perhaps of the other two at the piano. Mabel was again absurdly wrapped up in the fellow. But it was good to see her looking so happy.

Mabel, although as a musician she was more accomplished than inspired, was really an excellent accompanist. She had no desire to show her own prowess, and a great wish that Roddy should have his chance. Indeed his voice was remarkable and his diction excellent. If Mabel, who had a trained ear, and knew when a divergence from note must be concealed, helped him more than was legitimate or than would be conceded by an orchestra, none of her auditors were aware of it.

Amos openly expressed his pleasure after the first song, and praised it heartily. Cosmo, more cautious, said it was certainly a very good voice in a room, but he should like to hear it in a theatre or large concert hall. Fanny gave forth some wholly ignorant remarks about the music, which she said reminded her of Wagner. Cosmo, for his own entertainment, made her point out the resemblance, and Fanny said, perceiving she was being ridiculed, "Cosmo, I hate you," and began to wonder if she could persuade Ted to walk home; it was such a fine night and he needed exercise. Cosmo was never nicer to her than when he had been "nasty."

"Why *not* hear me in a theatre then? Why not make up a party and come on Wednesday? Then Mr. Juxton and you will both get an idea of what I am like on the stage. They are sending round notices and press invitations. I must say Edwards is behaving well over it. They are billing me as 'The Great Australian Tenor.'"

"I should so like to hear you on the stage," Mabel murmured.

"You mean all of us to come?" Amos said tentatively.

"It would be great fun," Fanny put in.

"As a matter of fact I believe I have a stall," Cosmo volunteered. Roddy urged Amos. He sang again, and gave them a specimen of what *he* could do that Oliver Orchard had left undone. Before Ted and Dennis returned from the garden, Amos had agreed to take the whole party to the theatre "if they could get seats." Fanny said if he thought of taking them on to supper at the Savoy afterwards he ought to secure a table. Amos had had no such thought, but in his good humour he said he would see about it.

It needed little manœuvring on Fanny's part to get Ted to walk home. Amos kept early hours, and did not hesitate presently in drawing his guests' attention to the fact that it was eleven o'clock. Ten minutes' whistling only succeeded in producing two derelict hansom cabs. Ted said he hated driving three in a cab, and Cosmo maintained an admirable calm whilst the matter was being argued. He had obviously no intention of walking. Ted said that he would rather walk, but that he had no latch key. Quite sweetly Fanny said she would sit up for him, and a little wifely touch of anxiety lest he should take cold without a coat gave the poor fellow so much pleasure that for the first time that evening they saw him smile.

"Oh, I'm as strong as a horse! Don't you worry about me. To tell you the honest truth, I like the cold."

Driving home with Mabel, Dennis, full of the conversation he had had with Ted in the garden, asked whether she thought anything could be done to make her brother's life a happier one.

"Make Ted's life happier?" she repeated. "But I do really think he is sometimes quite happy! Perhaps they understand each other better than we know. Ted lets fall a word or two to me now and again; he says everyone admires her. Their new house is so nice, although it is

dearer than father thinks prudent. It is so lucky they have got Mr. Merritt to share it with them."

"Is it?" asked Dennis drily, "is it?"

Mabel was surprised he should doubt it.

"Fanny really is frightened sometimes of Ted's temper. He seems to have no control over himself at all. And Mr. Merritt influences him. Ted is just like father, he thinks the world of Mr. Merritt. Fanny says she doesn't believe she would have gone to Grosvenor Street at all without Mr. Merritt. Oh, Dennis," she came a little closer to his side, Mabel was not demonstrative, but she did come closer to him, "I'm so glad you're so good-tempered. It is dreadful for husband and wife to be always quarrelling. I'm sure Fanny is fond of Ted: she always speaks so nicely about him when he isn't there, and says she is sorry he is so violent and difficult."

"Yes, I've heard her. But she never has her playful little paw, with its sharp talons, out of the sensitive parts of his flesh. It is pain makes him violent. Merritt laughs at her. I can't help thinking they would be better with him out of the house. Ted is of the same opinion, I fancy."

"I really don't think Fanny would like that at all," said Mabel doubtfully. "And surely you're wrong about Ted. I've heard him and Mr. Merritt talk racing together, and about all the things Ted likes. He is going to introduce them to such nice people. And the house is really too expensive for them alone."

"How much do you think Cosmo Merritt is going to pay for his suite of rooms, his food and the telephone?" asked Dennis curtly.

Mabel did not know, and Dennis could not convey to her the impression that Ted had left on his mind. Ted was loyal, and suspicion had hardly touched him, but there was no doubt the gossip had reached him, and if it had not shaken his confidence in either wife or friend, it was at

least worrying him. He had become suddenly doubtful of the wisdom of having Cosmo Merritt to live in his house. He told Dennis they had already had a row about it. He had tried to tell Fanny what people were saying, and she had turned upon him as if it were his fault. She had put herself in a perfect fury about it, said he had invented it, and God knows what beside! Fanny said if Mr. Merritt were turned out of the rooms that had been prepared for him in Grosvenor Street, she would refuse to live in the house, or with a man who suspected her! Ted did not suspect her, nor his friend. But he was very unhappy, and uncertain what he ought to do. It was not doubt of his wife, nor of his friend, that Dennis had read into Ted's halting speech, but of his own duty to both of them.

"It's what people are saying. Cossy will have it that it never matters what people say. But I could kill them when I think they are looking at her as if they thought . . . you know the sort of things people say. I say, Dennis, you don't think, no one could think, could they, that Fanny was that sort? I've been in a rage with her sometimes, and said things I'd have bitten my tongue out rather than believed. But it's only when I've been in a rage. She's so attractive . . . you can see for yourself how attractive she is. It isn't as if Cossy is a woman's man either. You know how little notice he takes of women. He was always like that at Cambridge, always. And he was dead against my marriage from the first. He only got reconciled to it after your wedding, when he saw for himself how clever she is. Not that he calls her clever, he laughs at her often. Advise, me, Dennis; I hate to seem to be always contradicting her, or to set myself against what she wishes. The house *is* expensive, but that's not anything to do with it. He's only going to pay two pounds a week. I don't want him to pay anything. I can't bear to think people are talking about her."

Ted's distress had been painful. All his love for Fanny, that incredible love at which Dennis wondered, could not make him quite blind to her conduct towards him. But he made endless allowances for her, and was ever humbly, miserably conscious of his own unworthiness, and shortcomings. Fanny said she "hated married life"; and whilst taking his money, for she had none of her own, living beyond his income and running him into endless debt, she lost no opportunity of ridiculing and running him down, of telling him how much happier she would be if she were free. Fanny's tongue was sharp, she had no conscience to restrain it, and poor Ted had neither peace nor love in his home. His own self-control was imperfect. Cosmo had hinted, had suggested. . . . Ted could not quite bring himself to put into words exactly what Cosmo had hinted or suggested. But there *were* other women in the world. If Fanny did not care for him, and if she was persistently cold, denying him his husband's rights, he could go where he was more welcome.

"Ever met a Mrs. Margaret Lemon?" Ted asked Dennis. And Dennis remembered his wedding journey, and the soft-eyed young woman who had told him marriage was imprisonment. "Cossy introduced me to her the other day. She's a rippin' nice woman, clever too, although she isn't always making you feel what a fool you are. . . ." Dennis was too sorry for Ted to argue with him. But Ted understood he had been shocked, and said hastily:

"Of course I'm really too fond of Fanny for that kind of thing. But isn't it enough to make a fellow wild?"

The conversation had ended abruptly and inconclusively. To convey the impression of it to Ted's sister proved impossible. Dennis soon left off trying, and drove the greater part of the way home in complete silence.

When he said good-night to Mabel at the door of her room, he added:

"By the way, you'll be glad to hear it's all right about

Seraphino. Your father was simply delighted with the 'Maria' song. He said he could have cried like a child only he held himself in. There's no doubt Roddy will have his chance."

"How kind of you to tell me . . ."

Dennis left her abruptly, he certainly did not want to be thanked.

CHAPTER VIII

It was before the evening of the projected theatre party that Mabel astonished her husband by telling him she thought of trying face massage. Rather hesitatingly, with a deprecatory glance as if she expected him to dissuade her, she said she heard it was good for neuralgia. Mabel was never untruthful, and rarely disingenuous. Dennis had not the clue to this development, and naturally misread it. He did not know it had been Fanny's suggestion and had its incentive in a story about himself and Connie Lander. Fanny said how "fascinating these variety actresses were," and that Dennis had been seen lunching at the Ritz. Then she went on to tell of her own troubles.

Fanny talked about "leaving Ted," the state of affairs between them was growing daily worse. If she seriously contemplated escaping from the stream of married life, it was characteristic for her to wish to leave the water behind her obscured and dirty. She scented intrigue between Mabel and Roddy, since the day the music room had been closed against her. She tried to raise a little gossip about Mabel's name; talking about her to Cosmo and at Crockford's, throwing out hints whenever she could obtain a listener. She advised Mabel to pay more attention to her dress, the face massage was followed by manicure; she said Mabel ought to try to make herself more attractive; to be attractive was woman's first duty. Mabel was quite in a flutter of pleasure over Fanny's kindness; and spent time and a little money in carrying out her suggestions; which by the way left her appearance very little altered; it affected her conversation chiefly, and set Dennis wondering. He

traced her manifestations of vanity to her renewed interest in Roddy Ainsworth, just as Fanny had intended.

But she did not vary at all in her attentiveness to her husband. To Dennis it seemed that in her own way, exculpatory, apologetic, newly timid, she was trying all the time to tell him that she was missing none of her wifely duties; depriving him of none of his rights. He understood her so well, or thought he did. He found himself seeing right through her; there was nothing that should not be there, something about which he caught himself wondering nevertheless. He knew that Roddy carried about him an effect of picturesqueness and adventure. He had fresh scenes and places to describe. If the descriptions were specialized, and he himself was in the foreground of every picture, Mabel might not find him less interesting in consequence. Dennis would not point out to her that she, and the piano, and the house, were being made use of to suit Ainsworth's convenience. Roddy was living in cheap apartments, and the grand piano at Hamilton Terrace was invaluable to him. When he was not practising Oliver Orchard's part with the orchestra at the theatre, he was practising it to Mabel's accompaniment in Hamilton Terrace. He lunched there nearly every day. Mabel was sorry Roddy had so little money, and hoped he would make a fortune with the new play. Roddy made constant demands upon her, upon her time, her attention, everything. Dennis had made no demand. It was wonderful how clearly Dennis saw the position, and how tolerant he was over it towards her in his mind. He seemed to understand her these days better than in all their life together before Roddy's return, and in some way to care for her more, guarding her happiness, careful in word and manner to reassure her that there was nothing at all wrong or unusual in what she was doing, that it was with his complete approval.

For himself he was really glad of a new sense of freedom

that came upon him, a sense it was no longer necessary to play at being his wife's companion, to listen to the monotonous talk, to give up his evenings to her. He could read in peace. His leg had entirely recovered from the strained ligature and his spirits shared in the improvement. Of course he heard too much about Roddy and his voice, Roddy and his career, Roddy and what people said of and to him, but this was a small price to pay for the freedom of his conscience. Certainly he was making his wife happy now. In cynical mood Dennis would tell himself that Roddy disfigured the house less, and less permanently, than the painted plaques. Mabel was apparently foredoomed to devote herself to cheap art; it was better for everybody that she should foster Roddy Ainsworth's voice, rather than produce flower pieces on satin or looking-glass. In more genial moments he knew that the completeness of Roddy Ainsworth's egotism found its counterpart in the completeness of Mabel's unselfishness. It seemed so natural that Mabel, who had given him his first encouragement in music, should be helping him now, that he was not even grateful. Dennis saw this and was a little resentful of it. He thought Roddy should show Mabel more attention, should bring her flowers or theatre tickets. He resented, even whilst acquiescing, in the actor's way of taking all her kindnesses as if they were his due, of using the Hamilton Terrace house as if it were his own. With all his satisfaction in the position of affairs, he missed his wife's need of him, missed it curiously.

The night of Roddy's first appearance in a London theatre, often postponed, came at last. Oliver Orchard had made a great effort when he saw the announcements of the "Great Australian Tenor" who was to take up his part, and went on a few weeks longer. But even his iron endurance had its breaking point, and a triple encore for Miss Venner had proved the last straw. It was given out that the doctors

had simply insisted on his taking a rest. But it is possible that what he heard of Roddy Ainsworth, and a slight deficiency of ear, was responsible for his obeying them. The London public could never be captured by a man who did not sing true, however magnificent his voice might be. So Oliver Orchard argued, and proved himself right; this, however, is history. London was true to her old favourite, although she had a welcome for the newcomer.

On the night of the theatre party Mabel habited herself in an art green satin, somewhat eccentric in cut, perhaps, but it had met with Fanny's approval. She wore also an oriental opera coat that had once graced a Mandarin, but was curiously incongruous with the severe English way with which she dressed her drab hair, and with the gold cross that depended from her thin neck.

She was very agitated, and in her anxiety not to be late, nor to miss a moment, succeeded in getting Dennis and herself to the theatre, almost before the covers were off the seats, or the attendants in attendance.

"Oh, I'm so sorry I made you come away so early! I'm afraid you've hardly finished your dinner, I hurried you so. My watch must have been wrong."

Mabel's wrist, day and evening, was decorated with a watch in a gold case, set in a gold curb. It had been Dennis's first gift to her, and she thought it would have hurt his feelings if she removed it. But in truth he had forgotten that he had given it to her, that it had been her choice of a betrothal present, and all about it.

"I don't mind being early, I like to see the people come in," he told her. He had no wish to spoil her anticipated pleasure in this evening, on which, for the first time, she was to see her friend upon the stage. For himself, he was in anticipation a little bored.

"I hope father won't be late. He is fetching Fanny and Ted. Mr. Merritt is coming, but not with them. His

father and sister will be here. Perhaps they are here already. It's almost like a first night, Fanny says. I've never been to a first night. Father says he is going to reserve a box for us for every first night at the 'Kemble.' I do hope there won't be too many. Roddy says 'Charles Auchester' will run a year. Oh dear, isn't it tiresome that they are so late. I wish they would come."

Dennis had never seen her so excited. As the time went on she craned her neck to watch for their coming, and said the same thing over and over again. She was so anxious lest her father and Fanny should miss Roddy's entrance that she almost forgot to be anxious of the effect that entry would produce upon the house. The programme shook in her trembling hands, and a flush showed irregularly on her cheeks.

The house filled gradually, the curtain had just risen, and even Cosmo Merritt was in his seat, before Fanny and Ted, piloted by Amos, disturbed everybody by their entrance. The management had used the occasion of Oliver Orchard's illness, and his replacement by Roddy Ainsworth, to announce a "second edition" of the play, with new dresses, dances, songs. The occupants of the stalls were principally press men and habitual first nighters.

The stalls were very close together, and every late comer necessitated some one's inconvenience.

Fanny was deliberate in her movements. She was very well dressed to-night and was not unwilling for her new chiffon opera cloak from *Poiret* to be admired. That the curtain was up, and that until she sat down she was obstructing other people's view of the stage, were not the sort of things to influence Mrs. Ted. Mabel's agitation, her heartfelt "Oh, I'm so glad you've come, he will be on in two minutes, do sit down" had not escaped her, and her laugh pointed the situation.

First she thought she would sit by Mabel, but at the

moment she made her choice she noticed Cosmo was talking to the man next to him. The man turned round to see who was causing the little disturbance, and Fanny caught his eye and smiled mischievously, as much as to say, "It's me, and you've got to put up with it." That mischievously flirtatious smile of Fanny's was distinctly attractive, the man looked again; and Fanny eventually took the seat behind him, leaving Amos beside his daughter.

The stage was filled with a moving gesticulating crowd of Irish washerwomen, each with her tub, in short red petticoats, green jackets, shawls over their heads. Their incongruous wooden shoes tap-tapped with the music from the orchestra, and they were singing a chorus of which "shillelagh" was the only distinguishable word.

Mabel's eyes and attention were now free for the stage. Amos had folded his hands upon his paunch, and the benignity of his expression made Cosmo think of archdeacons when he turned round and saw him. Fanny clamoured for a programme. Fanny had been too lazy to put on her gloves. Dennis always thought Fanny's were cruel hands. They were long in the fingers, the knuckles prominent and bony. The tops of the fingers were spatulate, and thick, the nails, cut in points, were over-manicured, the pink varnish contrasting ill with the yellowish skin. Fanny sat erect, for at any moment Cosmo or his companion might look at her; they were only one row in front. She wanted to talk, not to listen; to be noticed; most of all she wanted Cosmo and his companion to see her new cloak.

She pointed out celebrities to Dennis, who did not trouble to contradict her, although she was usually wrong, and he was much better acquainted than she with the fashionable London world. He wanted her to be quiet; but that was difficult to achieve when she was bent on attracting attention. She leaned across Amos to tell Mabel how nice she was looking, she even smiled on Ted and told him where his friend

Margaret Lemon was seated, with the tall fair man in glasses. Fanny said he was a well-known author. If he were a publisher, as Dennis surmised, it was quite near enough for Fanny. She was quite irrepressible, and people near them frowned and showed their annoyance. Mabel said:

"Oh, hush, do hush! Everybody is looking at us," in an agony of confusion and agitation. But nothing stilled Fanny, until the man next to Cosmo whispered an inquiry, and Cosmo glancing round, answered shortly. Then Fanny smiled again, and her manœuvres having accomplished their design, she settled herself in her place, hunching her shoulders, relapsing into ease.

The chorus was still proceeding; every washerwoman had a shillelagh in her tub, the sticks beat time with the music, the voices rose and fell rhythmically. Dennis, now that Fanny was silent, heard, above the strains from the orchestra, and the voices, clogs, and sticks on the stage, the buzz of talk behind him from the young critics of the weekly papers.

"Rotten idea making us sit the thing out twice within two months."

"Orchard isn't ill. He only had a row with Elsie Venner."

"She booted him. Serve him right, bounder! Who's the 'Great Australian Tenor"?

"How should I know? Some Johnnie from Whitechapel."

Dennis found everything more interesting than the stage. Musical comedy generally reduced him to a state of tolerant somnolency.

Amos applauded the washerwomen's chorus, he applauded when Roddy in the uniform of an officer of the Royal Irish Constabulary made an effective entry at the head of his men. Amos evidently felt the whole entertainment was given for him, and that the house was watching for his approval. He nodded his head in time to the music.

Fanny's manœuvers irritated Dennis; it was a long time now since she had tried her wiles on him, but he knew them all. Mabel, in her absorption, aroused his sympathy, although he wondered again what she could see in the fellow; the costume was ridiculous and he acted like a stick. Ted looked for once almost happy, under the stimulus of Fanny's amiability.

Then, quite suddenly, without any premonition, he became conscious of a quickening of pulse and interest. He looked away from Mabel and Ted, and his eyes, before they had time to reach the stage, were arrested by the most perfect back he had ever seen. He did not know a living woman's back could be so beautiful: he could not look away. Fanny's back was palely yellow, and in its thinness Dennis had always been conscious of that slight curvature. Poor Mabel's back was rounded, and the prominent shoulder blades were ugly. He had never seen a woman's back like the one before him.

Afterwards he knew that it was Lady Diana Wayne he was regarding with such absorption. For the moment he was only glad that her dress was cut in the early Victorian style, sloping off the shoulders, leaving the lovely top of the arms visible. Dennis was no sensualist; a clean living man, as yet almost entirely ignorant of woman and her possibilities. Beauty had hitherto made its appeal to him only through scenery, pictures, and statuary. He was, nevertheless, inexplicably attracted by the perfection of hue, and curve, and contour before him. Gazing, unaware that he was committing a *bêtise*, staring unwarrantably, he was becoming entranced by every movement of the slender, graceful neck. The dark hair was rolled up and away from it, the whiteness was dazzling. He saw the rounded, dimpled elbow, and imagined the slender wrist, the tapering fingers.

The back and arm absorbed him during the first act.

It was only towards the end of it that he was seized by an overmastering desire to see the face that surmounted this wonderful torso. He thought of the Venus of Milo, the crouching Venus, the Venus with the Cestus, all the Venuses with which he was familiar, but could find no equal to the one before him. He gratified his desire by going to the end of the stalls in the interval between the first and second act. The dark hair, parted in the middle, waved loosely into that roll of hair that left the back part of the neck visible. The profile, the short nose, the square chin, were pure Greek. She turned to speak to the man by her side. The movement of the slender neck was like music. Dennis could see the pencilled brows under the parted dark hair, and the iridescent green of her eyes. As she spoke and smiled, there were stars in the iris of her eyes; and the face was no longer Greek, it was vivid and sweet with life and laughter. Dennis lost himself in admiration. The low cut dress was black; the great row of priceless pearls was her only ornament. He guessed who she was; she must be Lady Diana Wayne, Cosmo Merritt's widowed sister. Her husband lay in a soldier's grave in India, killed in some obscure frontier trouble. But hers was not a widowed look, she was radiant with youth.

The play, Mabel, Roddy's entrance and exit, the applause, became shadowy and unreal to Dennis. He was absorbed in this beautiful face. It was not until the curtain had been raised and had fallen three separate times, that he recalled himself to his position, and remembered he must not stand where he was, and stare. She was one of a party of four, of whom one, the man whose attention Fanny had attracted, was evidently an acquaintance of Cosmo Merritt's. Cosmo and the man came out now together, Cosmo saying a word to Dennis as he passed.

It was very slowly, as one who moves in dreams, that Dennis followed the others into the *foyer*. He did not want

to smoke, nor to talk about the play, he wanted to be alone. He found that his father-in-law had buttonholed Cosmo, and was talking with conviction. Cosmo had already shunted his companion.

"He made a distinct hit, that young fellow, a distinct hit. I'll put his play on for him, then if it doesn't go, we shall see what we shall see. What do they call this? 'The Girl from Galway?' Well, anybody could write a play as good as that. There's nothing in it, nothing in it at all; it's all chorus and noise. Merritt, my boy . . ." He was about to say how very much better a thing he could produce if he had time.

"It is a bad play, but good business," Merritt interpolated. "We can do better, of course. I am surprised you are so pleased with Ainsworth, but I am sure you're right, you know the public taste, represent it. But wasn't he a little out of tune now and again? I thought he went flat occasionally. I saw Stephen Frail looking at him once, I thought he was going to stop the orchestra! But he is certainly extraordinarily handsome on the stage, a good mover, and with a personality. The women will be sure to run after him. My sister, Lady Diana Wayne, was just saying that he is the best looking man she has seen on the stage since she came back to England."

"She has been away?" Dennis asked, stupidly.

Cosmo looked at him curiously.

"She was in India when Wayne fell. She was more than a year with the Carews. After that she went big game shooting. Haverford has only just brought her back."

He forgot for the moment that Dennis was not in Society, and could not be expected to know its gossip.

Amos was impatient of Lady Diana Wayne. He wanted to talk of "Charles Auchester" and its chances, of the cost of a production like the one they were seeing, of himself as a potential playwright.

When Dennis went back to his seat he found Fanny had dropped her scarf, her gloves, her opera glasses. Mabel was looking for them, but the man who had left the theatre with Cosmo, and was again in his place, had been fortunate enough to secure the glasses.

"Are these what you are looking for?" he asked Fanny.

"Oh, yes. How good of you! they had fallen down."

Lady Diana turned to see what Haverford had found, she knew he would not have exerted himself to pick up opera glasses for a plain woman. For the moment, however, she failed to focus Fanny. Her eyes encountered Dennis's, and what she saw in them arrested her own. She had not time to recognize his party, nor to what social order they belonged. She did not then, nor until many events had happened, associate Dennis Passiful with Fanny, or Amos Juxton. She only saw a young man, of distinguished presence, who thought her beautiful, and could not keep his thoughts from showing in his eyes. Her own colour heightened, that was her only acknowledgment of his regard. She turned her face away abruptly, and then toward the stage. Certainly the man had looked at her more intently than he should. She would not on any account look round again. She wondered who he was, and once, at least, broke through her resolution.

Long afterwards she told Dennis she had dreamed of him that night, seen him quite distinctly, woke to wonder at such dreaming, slept, and had seen him again. But this was not until many events had taken place, and she was hearing how similar had been his own experience.

CHAPTER IX

In the crush of leaving the theatre Margaret Lemon, dark-eyed, languorous, found herself in close proximity to the Juxton party. The man with her, publisher or author, called out:

"Wait where you are, I'll get the brougham up in a minute."

She had on an opera cloak rather more elegant than Fanny's, and was surrounded by friends whom she was obviously entertaining with her slow and humorous comments on the play and the audience. Therefore Fanny resented it bitterly when she nodded to Dennis, with a recognizing smile, and a word of greeting, and then spoke to Ted, and seemed to distinguish him. Lord Haverford and Cosmo were nowhere near them. The whole party must have got away early. It was natural that Fanny should be displeased, standing there, exposed to the autumnal damp, in a gathering fog, with no one but Mabel to whom to talk. To hear Ted's hoarse laugh when he was in colloquy with "that woman," was galling. When they were in the motor Fanny said bitingly to Ted:

"*Must* you speak to that sort of woman when I and your sister are with you?" 'That sort of woman' was Fanny's euphemism for any lady better dressed than herself.

"What's the matter with Margaret?" asked Ted in surprise. He had rather prided himself upon his acquaintanceship with her since Cosmo had first taken him to see her. She seemed to him to be almost as clever as Fanny, he had seen and heard nothing that could justify Fanny's remark. In truth Margaret had only received Ted at Cosmo's request, he was not at all the type she affected.

"Who is 'Margaret'?" asked Amos. "Not that nice looking woman who was standing near you in the hall?"

"Yes, with the ruby on her finger." Fanny laughed maliciously. "You always say Ted's so extravagant. Perhaps that's what his money goes in! I know *I* have not got a ruby ring!"

"How you do go on! I've never even sent her a flower."

"I don't care if you've sent her a waggon-load of flowers, but I won't be insulted by your talking to low women when you are with me."

"Oh dear, Fanny, I'm sure Ted didn't mean to hurt you," Mabel hastened to put in.

"Hurt me!"

"Come, come, children, don't jangle. We're out to enjoy ourselves, aren't we? I want to hear what we all thought of young Ainsworth's singing."

Fanny could not afford to disregard Amos's evident wish that the matter should be allowed to drop. Of course what he really wanted was to tell them what *he* thought of Roddy's voice and presence upon the stage.

Ted had not yet recovered from the onslaught upon him when they found themselves in the hall of the Carlton. "Nothing I do is right," he muttered.

Dennis, on the box seat, heard none of these recriminations. In spite of the murky air, the gathering fog, and the autumn chill, Dennis felt warm and content. He had seen the most beautiful woman in the world. And she had seen him. That was the most curious thing about it. In her eyes when they had met his there was a sense of recognition, almost of understanding. Perhaps Cosmo Merritt had spoken to her about him! But that was impossible, and absurd. Not more impossible and absurd, however, than that she should be Cosmo's sister. The sister of fat and flaccid Cosmo! She, with her swan neck

and sylph form! Thus far had his musings taken him when they were at the hall of the Carlton, and he had to get down from the car and perform the duties of the footman whose place he had usurped.

Fanny was at once all smiles. She discovered so quickly that Cosmo was in the hall, and the other man with him. After all it seemed the evening was going to end up pleasantly. Cosmo lost no time in presenting Lord Haverford to Amos, and he had already given him the *carte du pays*. Before Fanny and Mabel disappeared into the cloak-room, Fanny heard Lord Haverford say:

"Glad to meet you, Mr. Juxton! That's a devilish clever book of yours. I congratulate you; by Jove, I do! Cossy tells me you're going to turn it into a play. I must have a box for the first night. Cossy, you'll see I get a box for the first night."

When Fanny and Mabel emerged from the cloak-room, Fanny, in the last stage of elegance and refinement, her nose newly powdered, a soupçon of rouge on her cheeks, her hair-net accurately adjusted over the *Marcel* waves, more ladylike even than the real article, they had become one party. Amos's gratified announcement that "Merritt and his friend are joining us for supper. Lord Haverford, my daughter — my daughter-in-law," regularised the position.

Fanny, walking up the lounge with that peculiar jerky, or springy step of hers, head erect, leading the party, was supremely conscious of Lord Haverford and the Honble. Cosmo Merritt in attendance, and imagined herself the cynosure of all eyes. Amos, secured a table near the door. They could see everybody, and what was much more important, everybody could see them. Fanny, talking to Lord Haverford, conveyed the implication that all her friends and acquaintances were to be found in Burke. Notwithstanding his irritation and anger, Ted was secretly

very proud of her. With the soupçon of rouge, and the darkening of her red lashes, her animation and pretty smiles, her white dress and youthful air, Fanny was really very captivating. Lord Haverford evidently thought so, and he gave the great Amos the most perfunctory attention. He paid Fanny compliments, ogling her and making his appreciation obvious. As supper went on he was found guffawing over empty jokes, saying "By Jove!" and "By Gad!" in a way that one expects from the House of Lords in Transpontine melodrama.

Lord Haverford was really so typical as to be almost a caricature. He was very nearly bald, and had a thin and weedy moustache at which he pulled intermittently with an aristocratic and indeterminate hand. His chin retreated one way and his forehead the other, as if they were afraid of meeting. He was enormously wealthy, but not at all fond of parting with his money. Boon companions would describe him as a "blood" and a "nut" and any other slang term that implied "seeing life" and gallantry; but in truth even his vices were feeblings. The only respectable and decent thing about him was his life-long devotion to his cousin Diana. It had survived her first marriage, and would probably have survived another. But it did not prevent him carrying on quite a lively flirtation with Fanny, who, of course, did considerably more than her share in inaugurating it.

Dennis watched them with a gathering sense of disgust, whilst Cosmo devoted himself to the propitiation of Amos. Surely Cosmo had said this fellow was engaged to his sister, that peerless, beautiful creature! To dally with Fanny when he could be in such incomparably better society, marked him the fool that his empty laugh proclaimed.

Just as they had finished supper, when the first warning lights went out, Margaret Lemon, at the next table to theirs,

supping *tête-à-tête* with Gerald Summers, recognised the party. She raised her glass to her lips, and sent a smiling greeting to the table.

"Do look at that woman," Fanny said to Lord Haverford. "She is actually trying to send you a message. No, it isn't to Lord Haverford, it's to you. . . ." She turned to Cosmo, still engaged in that earnest talk to Amos about the new venture. Both men's faces went in the direction she indicated, and, seeing Margaret, they smiled and nodded, lifting responsive glasses:

"You don't know Margaret, do you?" Cosmo said coolly to Fanny; he had recognised the malice in the pretty smile and glance. "Ted is more fortunate. Come, Ted, let's go over and speak to her."

Ted kept his place, looking uneasily at Fanny. But Haverford, to her unspeakable chagrin, rose with Cosmo:

"I'll come. Ripping woman, Margaret Lemon. You ought to know her, Mrs. Juxton. Two rippin' women together, eh, by Jove!"

"There, you see," Ted said triumphantly to his wife, not, however, following the other men. He had not the courage for that.

Amos read Fanny a little homily about misjudging people. He was fuller than ever to-night of the milk of human kindness, and overflowed with milky talk.

"You don't suppose Lord Haverford would go over and talk to her if there was anything wrong about her, do you? You shouldn't be so ready to think ill of people. It is not at all a nice trait. I am surprised at you. We are all as God made us, and if she is more striking looking than the majority, why, that's no reason she should be no better than she ought to be."

He was very glad to welcome his guests back again when they returned in good spirits, full of something amusing Margaret Lemon had told them.

"She's the best company in London," Cosmo said with *malice prepense*, noting Fanny's detached air.

"Barring the present — barring the present," Lord Haverford put in, proud of himself for the neat way he paid a compliment.

Cosmo explained to Amos that Margaret Lemon was one of the first people in London to appreciate "The Tale and the Typewriter," that it was she who had urged him to dramatise it, and he added one or two other apocryphal utterances.

Fanny knew Cosmo well enough to see that she had made a mistake, and she tried to repair it presently when Amos's attention was diverted to settling the account. Amos was attended by the head waiter, and the major domo, and other minor myrmidons. He pompously and benevolently assured them that everything had been served to his satisfaction, but nevertheless pointed out one or two ways in which the service, or the supper, could have been improved; they listened deferentially, and he gave generous gratuities to the right people.

Fanny, meanwhile, shrugging her thin shoulders, made a pseudo-apology in a low voice to Cosmo:

"I thought Ted made a rule of never speaking to a respectable woman?"

"'Respectable!' How Margaret would laugh if she heard you! I wish you knew her, but I can't get her to consent. I've asked her a dozen times. She says she can tolerate the upper and lower classes, but the *bourgeoisie* turn her stomach."

"How vulgar!"

If Fanny had a faint glimmering of Cosmo, he, on his part, knew his Fanny through and through. Now she was determined, as he anticipated, that an introduction should be effected. If the woman they all called Margaret Lemon could say things like that, Fanny would be able to make

use of her, learn her phraseology, copy her clothes. Under cover of the now almost complete darkness, and in the bustle of departure, she murmured to Lord Haverford:

"Can't you introduce me to your friend Mrs. Lemon? I believe we are neighbours. She lives in Berkeley Street, doesn't she?"

"Dover Street, next door to the Bath Club. She's pretty nearly always there; I saw her to-day with Lady de Wraythe. We'll fix up a meetin'; I'll see you home afterwards. Eh? Not a bad idea. To-morrow? Tuesday? When is it to be? I want to see you again."

Fanny was immensely exhilarated. She wanted to tell Cosmo that Lord Haverford had invited her to lunch with him at the Bath Club. And Lady de Wraythe might be there again. A title was a title to Fanny, and she could not be supposed to know that Lady de Wraythe had been the notorious Lotty Gordon of Music Hall fame. She accepted the invitation with avidity, fixing date and time so that there should be no mistake about it. She had a delightful hope that Cosmo might be jealous. But Cosmo, when the news was hastily conveyed to him, was only amused, and more than ever convinced of his own diplomatic talent. Margaret wanted to know Fanny, and Cosmo had known just how to bring it about.

Fanny actually spoke to Margaret in the cloak-room without an introduction at all, to the amazement of Mabel, to whom Fanny, however, was so often a bewilderment.

"This is your cloak, isn't it? It is so like mine." That paved the way. "But it is really much prettier."

Fanny smiled and Margaret disclaimed the superiority, but in a way that made the continuance of the conversation easy.

"I believe we have a great many mutual acquaintances. You know Lord Haverford, don't you?"

She did, a very great deal better than Fanny was ever

likely to, but this she did not say, claiming merely a casual acquaintanceship. But then there was Cossy . . .

"Oh yes, and I think I have met your husband, Mr. Edward Juxton."

Then it was that Mabel nudged her quietly.

"We ought not to keep father waiting."

Fanny actually shook hands with "that woman," being careful to do so at the most fashionable and impressive angle, and the wish that they should meet again seemed quite reciprocal.

In the car going home she was quite lively, and had not one unkind word to say to Ted. She thanked Amos very prettily for the pleasant evening he had given. She said she was looking forward to "their own" first night. Amos was quite sorry to leave her and Ted in Grosvenor Street.

"She can hold her own with any of them," was his appreciative remark as the car moved on again. "It's a pity they don't get on better." The allusion was obviously to Fanny and her husband, for she had got on excellently with Lord Haverford. "Ted has always been difficult."

"He is so sensitive," Mabel put in. Mabel had been in the background all the evening, but now she was alone with her husband and father, she came out a little, developing like a negative in a dark room. She was very anxious to know if her father was satisfied with Roddy, with the effect his entrance had made, with this, that, and the other song.

"Don't you think he was very good, and that the house liked him? He had three recalls. Dennis, you noticed it was his name they shouted?"

Amos said he had been very pleased with the young fellow, very pleased indeed. But Dennis had noticed nothing, and answered nothing. He was absorbed in retrospect; he was seeing again that wonderful neck. He was not able to resume his seat on the box, Mabel was too solicitous of

his catching cold, and it was easier to stay where he was than to argue.

Mabel and Amos talked all the way from Grosvenor Street to Hamilton Terrace of the play and Roddy, and the other play, the book and its dramatisation. Dennis sat in almost complete silence.

He was very glad presently of the solitude of his own room. So many women had looked at him, but never had he looked at a woman before to-night. Never, at least, with the same eyes. He wanted to be alone and think about her. He had often thought in this way of a picture, a set of Louis Seize mounts, a tapestry or a cabinet, visualizing them, dwelling on detail. To think of a beautiful woman with the same thrill of appreciation was new to him and astonishingly pleasant. In his room to-night he saw her quite plainly. That rolled-up hair from the centre parting was surely the perfection of head-dress. There was a lovely little dimple in the right shoulder. When he slept he dreamed of it, and of the radiant eyes.

CHAPTER X

RODDY rushed up to Hamilton Terrace betimes the next morning to hear what Amos had thought of his voice. He was full of the compliments that had been paid him by his colleagues behind the footlights, of various 'lines' in various papers. He had evidently seen nothing but favourable notices.

Dennis left him with Mabel; he was already late in getting to business. He heard them arranging for a long morning's practice.

"There is some difference in the climate. I can't tell what it is, but it affects my throat. You didn't notice anything, did you? I'd like to go through 'Heart of my Heart' with you, Mabel. Let's go upstairs. Say that nobody must disturb us. The conductor nearly stopped the orchestra last night. I don't know what he was doing, he put me out awfully. I didn't go flat, did I?"

Dennis was glad to be off. It was all right that Roddy should be there nearly every day to lunch; if he also stayed to dinner he talked to Mabel, but that was over for the present. Actors when fulfilling an engagement do not dine, Dennis would be saved that. He had grown used to hear of nothing but Roddy and his music. But this intrusion into his breakfast hour was an outrage, nothing but an outrage; so he told himself hotly. And yet he resented it but slightly as he thought of it on his way down. It was all part of the price he was paying for freedom. Whilst Mabel was happy and occupied he could do what he liked. He had a vague consciousness that he did not

like to do anything very desperate or unusual. It was a jolly good thing his leg was all right again. Want of exercise played the deuce with him. Last night he had caught himself dreaming, his dreams last night had been extraordinary. He did not want to dwell upon them just now, holding it over, like a gourmet with a tit-bit on his plate.

So things went on for a few days. But before the end of them he had recaptured, or thought that he had recaptured, his self-command. The dreams had grown fainter, and fitful. He wondered now sometimes if she had been so beautiful after all, if he would admire her as much if he saw her again. He even talked of her to Small, Wilfred Small, who was going to captain the team for South Africa when it went out next month. He had a knock up with him at the squash racquet court at Lord's and afterwards they walked down West together.

"You specialise in women, don't you?" he asked him lightly, jestingly; for Small's adventures were public property, and notorious. "Did you ever meet one who was actually as beautiful as a statue, perfect in every way, dimpled shoulders and elbows, curves like music?"

Small's answer cannot be given *in extenso;* it set Dennis tingling.

"I've known all sorts," he went on to say. "I wish to God I had not, they play the deuce with a man." Other details followed, and Dennis had to remind himself of Small's bowling performances against Kent before he was reconciled, and that he had just beaten him at racquets. Small was six feet two, dark, stalwart, inclined to be morose, and confidential about his love affairs. "I'm married now, you know." Dennis had known it. "Well, that's the very devil, that's the worst of all. It's imprisonment, without the option of a fine." It was strange Small should use Margaret Lemon's metaphor. "My wife, she's Stock-

holm's sister," Stockholm was the best wicket-keeper in England, "doesn't want me to go to Africa. She's kicking up hell about it, says she isn't well."

He was really gloomy, but Dennis perceived under his gloom a curious pride in the claim that was being put in for his company. He even admitted presently, grudgingly, that a fellow owed something to the woman who had married him. She really was 'down in the mouth,' at the prospect of parting with him, and the Doctor said 'it was bad for her to fret.' Small had also a certain pride in his prospects for the future, and spoke of the preliminary steps that should be taken if you want to turn a little shaver into a really fine bowler. It was premature, perhaps, but Dennis did not remind him of that, nor of the possibility of the expected "shaver" turning out a girl. He was conscious of a little envy of Small; not only of his prospects, but of his experiences, and that his wife would oppose his leaving her for so many weeks. Dennis had a new idea that Mabel would not mind now if he had arranged to go to South Africa. Still, he didn't think Small could possibly have met a woman as beautiful as Lady Diana Wayne. Stockholm's sister was certainly not much of a 'looker,' in cricketing circles parlance.

Just to refresh his memory, he went into the National Gallery to look again at Velasquez' "Venus with the Mirror." Again he decided that it was not by Velasquez at all. And he thought Lady Diana Wayne had a far more beautiful back, slenderer, more youthful. He thought nevertheless that he had been extraordinarily foolish in dwelling upon it, dreaming of it. He would dismiss it now, go into Christie's, go about his business, it was time to leave off dreaming.

This was Friday. To-morrow there was a big picture sale, and according to the catalogue, there were several good things. "Star turns," he called them to himself, and

smiled at the new vocabulary he was acquiring. From the National Gallery to Christie's in King Street was but five minutes. He ran lightly up the broad steps of those famous sale rooms. Quite a number of people were there, dealers with their clients, Society, for it was a well-known collection to be dispersed; idlers, and Lord Rosenstein. Lord Rosenstein was on the look out for Dennis. He buttonholed him immediately, and began talking about the three Nattiers: "one worse than the other."

"And they'll bid for 'em, Passiful. They'll bid for 'em as if they were masterpieces."

Lord Rosenstein walked round the big room with Dennis, talking all the time. Lord Rosenstein had been a great supporter of Abe Abinger. Barring himself, he had looked upon him as the best opinion on a picture to be had in England. It had been a great thing for Dennis when Lord Rosenstein began to come again to the Gallery after Abe's death, when he talked to the younger man as he had to the older, and gave him commissions. Lord Rosenstein liked the strong young arm to lean upon, and Dennis's deference to him. Lord Rosenstein patronised, lectured, and sometimes called him "my boy." There was no doubt he had a fund of expert knowledge, and Dennis in early days had been grateful for the patronage and glad to draw upon the knowledge. Now he was sometimes a little bored with his principal client; and wished he could turn him on to Dolland. It was not interest that kept him deferential; it was something nearer akin to pity. Lord Rosenstein was growing old, there were people who called him a bore. Most of his contemporaries were dead, he was a little lonely in that dwindling world of connoisseurs and collectors that he had once dominated. The big American buyer, ignorant, dealer-led, phenomenally wealthy, has entered the market, and the market is manipulated to suit the length of his purse.

"Prices are ludicrous now, out of all proportion. Thousands where we used to give hundreds. Isn't it so? And labels made to fit the pictures, even here. But I suppose they must put them up as they are sent in. Just look here, look at this, Passiful. *Watteau*, indeed; *Watteau!* They might just as well have labelled it Poussin!"

He had halted before a small oil colour of a dancing girl, delicate, rare, the paint breathed on to the canvas, the figure light, poised in movement.

"His signature is larger than the label, Passiful. He has written it large, if they could only see it. Who else could paint like that? Who else blew his paint on to the canvas? There is not a brush mark to be seen. I'll buy that, Passiful, I'll buy it. But don't tell them who painted it, don't tell them. Watteau! Watteau, indeed!"

It is impossible to convey his contempt for the mistake that had been made in attributing the little masterpiece to the wrong master.

Dennis made a note of the order, putting down in the catalogue,

"A Dancing Girl, labelled Watteau. By Fragonard."

Rosenstein peered over his arm.

"Good boy," he said, "good boy!" and patted his shoulder.

"Who is a good boy, Rosenstein?" said a voice from behind them.

It was Lord Loughborough, who knew Dennis, however, and nodded to him.

"So it is you, Mr. Passiful, who has merited the encomium. What have you been discovering?"

He then made a sort of informal introduction to his daughter, courteous, as befits a Liberal Peer to a man who buys and sells, but not familiar; for Lord Loughborough, like so many of the party with whom he had thrown in his fortunes, was strong upon class distinctions. Lady

Diana was greeting Lord Rosenstein when her father interrupted her to say:

"This is Mr. Passiful, my dear, who knows more about those miniatures you were looking at than even our friend here," indicating Rosenstein. "What have you done to make him so pleased with you? Agreed with some dictum that will turn the critics inside out, and strike dismay into the experts?" he asked Dennis.

Loughborough and Rosenstein were of the same school. Lord Loughborough had all the instincts of the collector, but he was too poor to indulge his fine taste. Many a tussle he had had with the other, however, before his children grew up to squander his income. And Rosenstein would have liked nothing better than to find him napping.

"Well, who painted that picture, eh?"

"What picture? The Watteau?"

"Watteau!"

Rosenstein's contempt did not prevent Loughborough from stoutly maintaining the correctness of the description. The two elderly connoisseurs had each a hundred reasons for his opinion.

Meanwhile Lady Diana would have been left stranded, for naturally her father did not appeal to her judgment, if she had not immediately recognized Dennis, and said to him, very simply:

"Didn't I see you at the theatre the other night?"

"It is very good of you to remember it."

The answer was quick, although low voiced. The sudden meeting threw Dennis from his balance. He felt now, for the moment, that he had taken a liberty in dreaming of her. And she was far more beautiful in walking costume than she had been in evening dress. It was a long time before Dennis ceased to think that every fresh dress in which he saw her was the most becoming in which she had ever appeared to him, and the one most calculated

to heighten her beauty. Certainly the sables enhanced the softness of her skin. Under her small fur toque the eyes, that he had thought were green, now seemed to be hazel, the radiance was in them still, and something of the changing colour of the sea.

"Do you really know so much about miniatures as father says? I should like you to tell me about an Oliver that is in the case in the other room. We have one so like it at home. Father, Mr. Passiful is going with me to see the Oliver. . . ."

But by this time the controversy had grown heated, and Lord Loughborough was much too keen upon proving his point with his old rival and lifelong friend, to notice what became of his somewhat inconvenient daughter.

"Why do you say it was kind of me to remember seeing you at the play?" Diana asked as they moved off. But she did not wait for the answer. Here a bit of silver in a glass case arrested her, and there a Jacobean needlework picture. The great sale was to-morrow, but all the rooms through which they strolled as they talked were full of rare and beautiful things. It seemed that Lady Diana knew something about them all. That Dennis knew more impressed her, while to him it seemed wonderful how keen was her interest, how just her judgment.

"I never can understand how people can collect such things as these . . .;" *these* were the needlework pictures; "they are merely old, very ugly, generally with a suggestion of dirt and decay, of moth and general disorder. I only care for things antique when they are also things beautiful. And you, what do you think? What do you collect?"

Dennis stammered something about "Chippendale." It was many years since he had thought there was anything *infra dig.* in having a Gallery in Bond Street. Now for the moment, quite suddenly, he wished he had not been

a dealer, wished that he was here as she imagined him, only as an amateur, a collector, a buyer of beautiful things.

"I have a little 'Hawthorne,' too."

She could not imagine why he hesitated about it. She was even more enthusiastic about Hawthorne than Chippendale. For herself she had made some study of English china, had inherited a few fine pieces of Chelsea and Bow from her godmother, but was too poor to add to them; so she had specialized in pottery, early Staffordshire. Before they arrived at the Oliver, Dennis thought her beauty was eclipsed by her learning, and that her voice was even more like music than her curves. It was not to be expected that he would remember that she had already been round the rooms with Lord Loughborough, whose knowledge and taste were both proverbial.

Diana, on her part, was greatly taken by her cavalier. There was no doubt Mr. Passiful was one of the most attractive looking men she had ever seen, and extraordinarily more intelligent than the soldiers with whom so much of her life had been passed. There was nothing to differentiate him except his intelligence. He wore his hat at the right angle, carried his height with grace, and was quite unable to conceal his admiration for her. Diana liked admiration. She had had a great deal of it in her time; for although Dennis might have exaggerated her good looks they were really quite remarkable. But no amount of admiration had brought her satiety.

At first they talked of the things about them; but drifted now and again to a more personal theme. Dennis told her, for instance, that his father had been an artist, and something about the Heath pictures. It was strange how soon he found himself at ease with her. He seemed to have known her so much longer than just the last half hour. But then she had been in his mind all the week. He felt himself flush once or twice whilst he was talking to

her; that was when he remembered a dream, and his visit to the National Gallery to recall the Velasquez Venus. He had a feeling of indelicacy about that, as if he ought not to have done it. But of course it was not like her, not in the least; the picture was that of a big woman; she was slender, sinuous. He was so glad that he had the opportunity here of correcting his impressions. Although she was slender, she was not short. The top of her sable toque was on a level with his eyes, and he was over six feet. Her veil was very clear, with little spots on it. He said irrelevantly,

"Did you ever see a picture by Sickert of a woman in outdoor costume with hat and veil?"

"No. Why? Do you think me like it?"

"I was only thinking of your veil," he answered.

"What a strange thing to think about!"

Soon afterwards Lord Loughborough joined them, with the conscious self-satisfaction of one who felt he had wrestled well and defeated his adversary.

"All you fellows pander to Rosenstein," he said to Dennis. "You have not really a serious doubt about that 'Dancing Girl' being by Watteau, have you?"

Dennis may have pandered to Lord Rosenstein, for he had a feeling of loyalty to Abe Abinger in carrying on the tradition of the Gallery. But he had the wit, or the adroitness, to admit to Lord Loughborough that the matter was certainly doubtful, thus giving Lord Loughborough the pleasure of persuading him that there was no doubt at all about it.

"I have a Watteau drawing at home, half-a-dozen dancing figures; one of them has the very movement of this, the grace. What do you think the picture will fetch? Has Rosenstein given you a commission for it?"

Dennis was unable to say Lord Rosenstein had given him a commission, but his professional opinion valued the pic-

ture at a figure that put it out of Lord Loughborough's power to purchase. His smooth red face took on a petulant expression.

"It's always the way, one cannot buy a thing now-a-days. Every soul I know complains of poverty, but there is always money enough for works of art. Nothing goes cheap."

Dennis agreed. He lifted his hat in farewell. Lady Diana put out an unexpected hand.

"You will come and see us in Curzon Street, won't you? Perhaps you would like to look at that drawing of which my father speaks. We have other things that might interest you. You will find me at home almost any day, after five."

He took her little hand, it seemed to disappear in his. He wondered what it would have felt like if it had not been gloved.

"I shall like to come," he answered quickly. He forgot she did not yet know who he was. It was not likely, either, that he would notice Lord Loughborough failed to endorse his daughter's invitation.

Dennis walked away with his heart very light. If he lunched at all that day, it was but a perfunctory business. He was as one whose face is turned towards an enchanted garden. Already the perfume from its flowers was wafted to him, and he heard the glad sound of the fountains from afar. There were trees with branches that rustled in the sweet air. Somewhere Pan was playing his pipes. And there was blue sky to be seen between the branches, and a dapple of sunshine on the sward. With such a garden Prince's was incongruous, and the Ritz impossible. The sudden hunger he knew was not the hunger of the body, but of the spirit. And all the time he was surprised at himself, wondering indeed if he were quite well.

Lord Loughborough, who was not an idealist, but that

thing of shreds and patches, a Liberal Peer, remonstrated with his daughter for her imprudence.

"What on earth made you ask young Passiful to come and see you? He will only think I want him to buy the heirlooms. It hasn't come to that yet. Although," he added gloomily, "it is probably only a question of time."

Her query elicited that her late companion executed commissions for gentlemen like her father and Lord Rosenstein. There was no denying that it was somewhat of a shock, although it was one from which she quickly recovered. Lord Loughborough went on to say, indifferently, that he supposed one could not quite place Passiful with the general run of dealers. Apparently he had a bad opinion of the 'general run" of dealers.

"There's some story going about him. I forget what it is. Some one told me he was an illegitimate son of old Mountford." Old Mountford was the Duke of Glastonbury. "I don't think it is true; not that Mountford would be above it, but he looks better bred. I believe he races."

Lord Loughborough knew that Dennis Passiful was associated in his mind with some form of sport, it was very unimportant which; his mind was so full of other things. The sport with which he was most familiar and immediately concerned was racing; so he concluded it was that. A letter from his heir lay heavy in his pocket; and his first visit after breakfast that morning had been to the family lawyers.

After she had recovered from the first shock of hearing that her new admirer was hardly in her own world, Diana began to reconsider him. Certainly he gained in romance. In the result her father's incautious words succeeded in piquing, not deadening, her interest. To restore her father's drooping spirits was her immediate task; there was never any doubt what depressed them.

"Is it Mervyn or Vansittart?" she asked, wisely.

It was unlikely that the news from Morocco was worry-

ing him, the coal strikes in Wales, or the threatened famine in India, the Chinese rising or the conduct of the Italians in Tripoli. Lord Loughborough did not take his country's business very seriously; when not pursuing his hobby, he lounged contentedly enough in the windows of his Club in Pall Mall. He would have been a happy man if he had neither had to support his children, nor to put up with their society. Under these circumstances, and if never contradicted, even his temper might have left little to be desired. As circumstances made him, he was a little uncertain in his humours. Diana, needing maintenance for the moment, put up with its drawbacks. She always had the option of marrying her cousin, although it was one of which she was slow to avail herself.

"If it isn't Mervyn, it must be Vansittart," she said sapiently, but not aloud; exerting herself during the walk home to make herself so agreeable that he would be able, if only momentarily, to forget her brothers. And presently the reward of her father's confidence was hers.

"The only one of you who does not bleed me from morning to night is Cosmo," was the beginning that confirmed her judgment, and led to a summary of what his children, and especially the Honourable Captain Mervyn, had cost him during the last three years If Vansittart represented the interests of the estate, it was equally exasperating. He wanted money for drainage or cottages, Mervyn for gambling and women, she for dress; all of them had some excuse.

It was true that her own jointure was insufficient for her needs. Dress is terribly expensive, and she had failed to produce the Wayne heir that would have made so great a difference to her income.

"It is something that Cosmo never worries you in this way," she said sympathetically. "He, at least, takes his allowance and lives on it decently."

"I would not go so far as that, I don't call it decent to go about like Cosmo. Look at the people he knows, look at that fat man he was talking to the other night!"

But she recollected her rôle, and got the conversation safely back to bric-à-brac. Nothing more was said about her imprudence in inviting Mr. Passiful to call. She could trust her wit to find further excuse if necessary.

She had quite made up her mind to see him again. Everything about him had pleased and attracted her; she had balked so many of her inclinations; she would not balk this one.

She had married Colonel Wayne to please her father, or to escape from her home. They had not had a thought nor an opinion in common, and he was five and twenty years older than she. Yet she had made him a good wife, as wives go in these circles. He had been his uncle's heir, and his uncle had been over eighty when they married. Who could have expected that the murder by a few blacks of an unnecessary missionary, and the punitive expedition that followed, would have resulted in the death of the heir before the uncle, and the ruin of her own fine prospects? If she had had a son it would have been different. Now she was almost as poor as before her marriage, whilst her home was barely more tolerable. There was always Haverford, of course. But there was nothing in her tentative promise to her cousin Adolphus, Lord Haverford, to prevent her from seeing something of a really attractive man when she met one. And the more impossible he was from a social point of view, for she was capable of reasoning either way, the less danger there would be in her talking to him when the occasion served, or even of making such occasion. There were so few people in Town, every one she knew was so dull, life was dull.

CHAPTER XI

It is to Dennis's credit that he allowed three days to pass before he paid his first visit to Curzon Street. He had already a vague, fleeting, occasional sense of fear, mistrust. Enchanted gardens are, perhaps, dangerous places for a cricketer, for a man who wanted to improve his golf handicap, or for a Bond Street picture-dealer with a wife in Hamilton Terrace. But these gusts of indecision and doubt were very vague and occasional. For the greater part of the time he turned his face deliberately to where the scented air could reach him, drinking it in, luxuriating in it. It was good to be alive those days, to feel the sap rising in the veins, and the heart bounding exultantly. There was neither sense nor reason in it, in the sudden inexplicable flushes, the unevenness of the pulses, the almost physical thirst; but without sense or reason, it was nevertheless exhilarating.

The day he chose for his visit was grey and dull, but he saw neither the greyness nor dulness. He did not know of what he should talk, nor how long he would stay. If this were the garden whence all those sweet winds had blown as they listed, it was enough to know his feet might enter. Something of awe was in him as he rang the electric bell of that ponderous door; he did not know what he might encounter. The unexpected width and sombreness of the hall was part of the enchantment.

He was heralded upstairs; the drawing-room was full of women clothed in furs, in large hats, chattering, and it was a moment or two before she emerged. Then the greeting was ordinary, cool. It was incredible that he should have

expected otherwise. But the coolness steadied him, and presently he was handing tea-cups, capping commonplace with commonplace. She moved among her guests, and quite soon he found himself watching her. Surely the dress she had on to-day was the one in which she was most beautiful. It was black and long, hanging in light and graceful lines, clinging to her slenderness in the mode then fashionable; like a sheath to a flower, he thought. When she sat for a hovering moment in the chair beside him, he was near enough to see that the ears behind which the parted hair disappeared into its roll, were so small and pale and wonderful, that he had no analogy for them. 'Shell-like' seemed an inappropriate word. He connected corrugation with the word 'shell' and a hard, fan-shaped thing he had found in thousands on the beach near Westgate when he had been taken there as a child.

Dennis moved in indecision when that hovering moment was past. Perhaps he had already stayed the ten minutes prescribed by etiquette. He was no law-breaker; he would go. But a word came to him, he hardly knew whence: '*Stay.*' Before he realised it, all those voluble clothes props had gone, said their adieus, vanished into the outer darkness, and he and she were alone. The large room was beautiful with the flotsam and jetsam of other centuries; pictures on the walls, ivories in the cabinet, Sèvres on the mantelpiece, miniatures and snuff-boxes in the *vitrines*. It was but a vague impression he had of these things. She sank into the corner of the big sofa with something like a sigh of relief.

"Now we can talk."

Of course she saw his eyes fall to the level where her feet, slender ankled, with high instep, prettily shod, were worthy of his inspection.

"Don't say you want to see the drawings at once, that you haven't a moment to spare! I'm exhausted with my

Aunt Mary, and a swarm of cousins, I know the gossip of two continents. I want to be rested. Tell me something new and different, about things, not people. Did you buy the Watteau that was by Fragonard, or the Fragonard that was by Watteau? What a much more interesting life you lead than other people do. My father was telling me of it. How did it come about?"

She was not less tired of gossip and commonplace than she professed. She had been five years in India, and after that in Egypt with the Carews. This was almost the first autumn she had spent in town, for she had married from Denham, and her first London season had been her last. Mervyn was stationed at Aldershot, and was fully occupied when he came up for the day or night. Vansittart remained at Denham in his chosen post, as his father's estate agent. She had no one to play with but Cosmo, and Cosmo failed her often, although he was attached to her in his way, and proud of her beauty, and that she had held Dolly Haverford all these years. But she was dull, dull, dull. She felt more widowed here than she had in the two years of her widowhood. She meant Dennis Passiful to amuse her. There was a romance in his life. Well, he should tell it her. It was barely 6 o'clock, too dark to see the drawings, too early to dress for dinner.

"*Do* you want to see the drawings at once? My father was afraid you would think he wanted to sell them."

This was the only moment Diana felt the question of social inequality might come in. For a fleeting second she wondered if she had said the wrong thing, reminded him of Bond Street, or Christie's. He had not answered her query as to how it had all come about. But she was speedily reassured. Dennis smiled, and said he was not in the slightest hurry to see the drawings. His smile was really quite attractive, and when their eyes met, and she smiled too, she was sure that they were going to like each other.

"I promise I will not make him an offer for them. I am not always thinking of business."

"I suppose I must not ask you what you do think about," he said quickly, too quickly, she was surprised at her own question, and would have withdrawn it. After all he was the merest acquaintance; she was always too impulsive. But her slight hesitation made it easy for him to plunge into talk. He had had little companionship with women. His very attraction for them had been against it. This was different, different from anything that had ever happened to him. She had intellect, interest in artistic pursuits, and in the things among which his life was spent. It was not difficult to find subjects of conversation. There was that Titian for instance, it was the most recent acquisition to the National Gallery and the most debated. There was again a slight pause, during which he wished he had not been to the National Gallery so recently, and for such a reason. He had an uncomfortable moment, and then he found himself discussing the merits, the critics of the picture. Quite soon they were on easy terms. He was not telling her about himself, of all she wished to hear; instead, she was telling him of her family; of Mervyn, in the Guards, whose extravagance kept them all poor; of Vansittart, who lived the year round at Denham, complaining always that too much money was spent out of, and too little on, the estate. She was rather plaintive on that score, and a word lamenting her widowhood; hinting at the inadequate provision made for her, aroused his sympathies. She said, almost under her breath, as if she were talking generally, that it was dreadful the sacrifices poverty necessitated.

If she were thinking of clothes, regretting the evening coat of chinchilla that was beyond her means, it was not wonderful that he should have thought she meant other deprivations. Already he began to be ashamed of his comparative wealth, to tell her how recent it was. He

wished he could give her things. Already he thought it monstrous that her brothers, or her father, should grudge what she needed. In thinking of her need he forgot her beauty. When, presently, she spoke of her mother, and how dreadful it had been to be so far from her when she died, he found within his eyes the tears of two. He spoke of his own mother whom he had never known. In the gathering dusk of the autumn afternoon they grew almost to intimacy; although it was more an intimacy of imagination, than one brought about by words.

"I have a third brother, Cosmo; I think he is my favourite of them all. We are nearest in age, he is only two years older than I am."

"Only two years! I should have thought it was ten."

"Then you know Cosmo?" she asked in surprise. "And I suppose you know Mrs. Margaret Lemon, too?" Perhaps he would tell her more about her brother, about his life. She always felt Cosmo was too secretive. This it was that helped to make life dull. She missed Cosmo's confidences. It was her father who had thrown out an incautious word about Mrs. Margaret Lemon, had told her to look the other way when she saw them together. She was not so innocent but that she knew men had women acquaintances or friends whom their sisters could not know. But Cosmo himself had told her his father had been mistaken. He said that Margaret Lemon helped him in his work, played Egeria to him, inspired him; that that was all.

Dennis might have been surprised at the question, or the implication, only there was no room in his mind for surprise. He was drinking her in very slowly, but nevertheless she was mounting to his head. Her voice was as beautiful as her face, and what she said was of little moment, since it was she who was saying it, and to him. None of their conversation represented the phase through which both were passing.

"I have met Mrs. Lemon twice. Is she then a great friend of your brother's?"

"I believe so. Father was much exercised in his mind about it when I first returned from South Africa, and used to bewail himself to me. Now, however, I think Cossy has switched his facile affections to the daughter or daughter-in-law of our 'greatest living grocer'; that is Cossy's name for Amos Juxton. She seems an underbred little woman. I have seen him with her once or twice."

It was too dark for her to see his face; it is strange, therefore, how she felt in him a slight embarrassment, an awkwardness. She wondered what she had said that caused it; wondered, but went on easily before he had time to collect himself, or, realising it was of Fanny she was speaking, to discover to her his connection with Amos Juxton.

"But Cosmo has always been more or less a philanderer. I believe that is his step I hear. Ring the bell, will you? It's time we had the lights. Don't go, you must see those drawings."

Cosmo's entry with Lord Haverford, the turn of the switch that flooded the room with electric light, destroyed the enchantment of the hour. If Cosmo was surprised to find Dennis with his sister, he was too well bred to show it. As for Lord Haverford he was generally unconscious of anybody else when he was in the presence of his cousin and fiancée.

It was quite a different Haverford that Dennis encountered in Lady Diana's drawing-room from the one that had guffawed with Fanny at the Carlton. If he had a vaguely proprietorial air when he took his seat on the sofa beside her, it was dashed by nervousness. Di had certainly promised to marry him, but the date was still unfixed, she treated him indifferently, and never twice alike. He knew that he owed what favour she showed him to her father's sordid consideration of ways and means, to his irritability over

her expenses. Intending to take the fullest advantage of her extremity, he nevertheless lacked the courage of his intentions.

She was, however, strangely gracious to him this evening: and made him welcome beside her on the sofa.

"I haven't seen you all the week," she said, with a smile. "What have you been doing with yourself? Do you want tea, Cossy, or whisky and soda? It's six o'clock, isn't it? Mr. Passiful — you know Mr. Passiful, don't you? — has come in to see those Watteau drawings father brought up from Denham. I suppose you haven't the least idea where they are to be found?"

Dennis, who wished to leave, paused at her words. It gave him a strange uneasiness to see Haverford with her on the sofa, to note her smiling greeting; and he was glad when Cosmo said, flinging himself into the easiest chair in the room, that he had not the least idea where the drawings were, and he was much too exhausted to search.

"Come and see them another day, old fellow," he said to Dennis. "My father likes to show them himself. He'll yap for hours about his collections. It may amuse you, but it bores us all most confoundedly."

Dennis felt himself dismissed, but he had wanted to go ever since Lord Haverford had come in. It was perhaps inevitable that Haverford's Christian name should be Adolphus, but "Dolly" was a hateful abbreviation on her lips.

"Cossy is quite right," she said when she held out her hand to him; "my father must show you those drawings himself. I'll find out when he is free and let you know."

She reverted to him later on, and asked Cosmo:

"Does Mr. Passiful really know as much about pictures and works of art generally as father thinks? He seems very young to be so learned!" Diana was in that very early stage when she wanted to talk about the man who had attracted her.

Cosmo did not share Fanny's dislike of Dennis, suspecting its source. If he had any feeling at all toward him it was one a little warmer than toleration. Not an athlete himself, athleticism excited in him a certain half unwilling admiration.

"I should think what Passiful doesn't know about works of art isn't worth knowing. How did you pick him up, Di? He is not at all your type. A Sir Lancelot of the suburbs, without a Guinevere; his Holy Grail being Warner's average. Your attentions will be wasted." The light and cynical tone was habitual to him.

"Don't be so absurd!"

Haverford, sucking the stick that he had brought into the room for companionship, asked if he knew anything about armour. Naturally he had missed the Sir Lancelot allusion.

"Thorpe is full of old armour. They tell me it's worth a pile of money. It ought to be catalogued, or insured, or something. Cadsby has written me a long screed about it. D'you think this fellow could put me in the way of it?" Then he added, for Diana was being very nice to him and had not even rejected a tentative hand that sought her own, and held it: "Cadsby is seeing what's wanted doing down there." He was still a little shy about his engagement. "You might help me, Di. I'd like to get the place nice for you."

Diana gently put away the effeminate hand that held hers flabbily.

"Of course I'll help you. But from what I recollect of Thorpe it is very nearly perfect as it is."

"Well, of course, if you like it, Di . . ."

She really could not stand Dolly when he was sentimental.

"About the armour. I should think Mr. Cadsby is quite right; he is your agent, isn't he? Probably he knows

more about Berkshire pigs than Toledo blades. Would you like me to speak to Mr. Passiful about it?"

His little eyes were almost eloquent when he turned them on her; he was pathetically eager.

"Speak to anyone you like; do anything you like about it. I want you to take an interest in Thorpe, Di. You're not going to keep me waiting much longer?"

"Oh, Lord; I suppose I am in the way! What a nuisance. I had just found the most comfortable angle of the chair. I would have liked a nap in it before dinner." Cosmo rose slowly. "But I cannot possibly risk assisting at a love-feast. When I first came in I had rather an idea I was interrupting one," he added, for Diana's benefit alone, and was amused when he saw her change of expression, her angry flush.

Perhaps one of the reasons Diana had for liking Cosmo better than her elder brother, was that he was so much more intelligent. But at the moment she resented his intelligence.

When she was alone with Haverford she talked of Thorpe as if she had really made up her mind to share its ancient splendours with him. She could not, nevertheless, fail to contrast him with the other who had sat with her but a short time before, and to whom she had talked with that consciousness of being met half way, responded to and understood. At his best Haverford had little more sympathetic quality than a jelly-fish. She might make him quiver, but she could not make him comprehend. She suffered a kiss or two, for she was up to her eyes in debt, and her father more difficult than usual. For some inexplicable reason, nevertheless, after Cosmo had left the room her spirits were buoyant, and she felt kindly, even towards Dolly. If it had been possible for him to be more in love with her than he had been for the last ten years, she would have brought it about by her treatment. He

did press her to fix a date for their marriage, and although he had to be content with something vague about the 'end of next season,' he felt more secure than he had since he brought her home from Egypt, and more confident that she was not fooling him, that she really had meant what she said when she had answered his forty-fifth proposal with a tentative acceptance.

How could he imagine that she was playing for safety, that already she doubted if her new friend might not prove too attractive, that she was strengthening herself against him, assuring herself that in the security of her engagement to her cousin she could afford to indulge a caprice, enjoy the companionship of a man of culture, which no one could of course call Dolly.

At dinner that evening she gratified her father by telling him casually she had arranged to marry Haverford in a few months' time — at the end of next season, in fact. She hoped that suited him? When he replied with something more than the alacrity she expected, suggesting even that, as far as he was concerned, it was unnecessary to wait until the very end, she threw in a casual allusion to her other afternoon visitor.

"Dolly is very much exercised in his mind about the collection of armour at Thorpe. I am arranging for Mr. Passiful to send a man down. I suppose he knows all about it?"

"I should not say Passiful was the best man on armour. Deeping is *the* authority. Why not consult Deeping?" He liked to think of his daughter at Thorpe. Part of it was thirteenth century, all of it was historical.

Diana burnt her boats quickly:

"It is too late now, we've practically arranged that Mr. Passiful is to take it in hand." Then, as afterthought and with an effort, although she tried to speak quite coolly, she added: "I have asked Mr. Passiful to dine with

us next week, to meet Dolph. You said something about entertaining your colleagues. The Luscombes are in town, and the Adairs. Everyone likes to be asked to dinner in October, if they are passing through, or up to get clothes." She gave hurriedly concocted arguments for an October dinner party.

The servants were still in the room, and Lord Loughborough held back his exclamation until the dessert was on the table. Then he said:

"You have not really asked Mr. Passiful to dine with us?"

Diana having gone so far, was not prepared to retreat. She went on pealing her peach very deliberately as she spoke, her voice indifferent.

"Indeed I have. Is there any reason why I should not?" she asked, as if in surprise. "We cannot resent his illegitimacy, if he *is* illegitimate. Although for myself I think the whole story is probably a *canard*. He's not in the least like Mountford to begin with. He is extraordinarily good-looking, whilst the Duke might have been a baboon for all the difference it would make in his appearance. Aunt Mary was delighted with Mr. Passiful. She was asking all about him, hinting mysterious things. I told her no one knew exactly whose son he was. She said he was very like a man she knew once. She wants to meet him again."

This was a stroke of genius, besides having a basis of truth in it. 'Aunt Mary' was the Duchess of Newtown, a very considerable person, her father's sister, who had early won his respect by her brilliant marriage. Diana's deliberation over her peach hid her expression as she went on with her little tarradiddles. The impression conveyed to Lord Loughborough, it is difficult to say how, was that the Duchess had discovered an interest in Mr. Passiful, and wished to meet him again; that it was her idea as much

as Diana's that Mr. Passiful should be asked to dine with them, and that she intended to interrogate him on his family history. Certainly Lord Loughborough had heard rumours about young Passiful's parentage. Only want of interest was responsible for his want of memory of what these rumours had been.

"But who does she think his people are? What is all the mystery about him?" he asked testily. "To me he seems a very ordinary young man, above his position, perhaps. But not in ours, your aunt will not forget that, I hope."

Diana was already ticking off on the tablecloth with a jewelled pencil that hung among the trinkets of her bag, a list of guests to whom they owed hospitality.

Loughborough grumbled, and said to use the tablecloth for such a purpose was just like her extravagant habits, all his children were the same, combined to ruin him. There were times when the merest trifle ruffled him. But then the butler had forgotten to take the chill off the Burgundy, Vansittart's letter was still unanswered, and he had both excuses for his ill temper. Diana ignored it. She had a gift for managing her father, and presently he was jogging her memory about the people who were in London. He said nothing more about Dennis Passiful; she had led him away from it skilfully.

She was really possessed of tact, and there were times when Lord Loughborough knew she was an ornament to his house. Now, having established her point, by the best possible way of ignoring that there was one, she made herself thoroughly agreeable to him, suggesting the chilly Burgundy should be replaced by a bottle of '94 port, listening whilst he told her how he had bought it for a mere song at poor Summer's sale, and of the other bargains that he had picked up at the same time. She had heard it all before; she was therefore able to abstract her mind,

and wonder what Dennis Passiful would say when he received her invitation.

"A country sale, my dear; most misleading catalogue, and mismanaged from start to finish."

She had heard it often before, but he thought that she was listening with absorbed interest. He got mellow with the mellow port, and presently was telling her other familiar stories of sale-rooms, and his own acumen. When she left him to finish his cigar, he was quite sorry to open the door for her.

"You need not hurry away, my dear," marked the high-water mark of his favour. But she pleaded letters to write.

Would he be glad? Was he as keen to meet her again as she to meet him? She never doubted it; it was not the first time a man had been in love with her. It *was* the first time, that was the strange part of it, that she had wanted to know how it would be when he told her so. She did not think Mr. Passiful would make love well; and she wanted to assure herself on this point. There was so much more in him than in other men, in many ways he was so different; he was boyish, inexperienced, ingenuous, altogether a new experience.

The hour by herself in her drawing-room was spent in wondering how she should word her letter to Dennis, and how she should contrive that he sat next her at the table.

CHAPTER XII

THE invitation, eventually quite formally worded, arrived in Hamilton Terrace at breakfast time. Dennis flushed while reading it, short and formal though it was, and let it lie beside his plate until he had finished his coffee. Then, casually, from behind the bulwark of his newspaper, he said:

"That's an invitation to dine in Curzon Street next Wednesday, at Lord Loughborough's."

"Mr. Merritt's father! How very nice of them; father *will* be so pleased. Wednesday! What a short invitation! I shan't have time to get a new dress. Isn't that tiresome? What made them write to you, ought not they have written to me? Oh, but I forgot. There is no Lady Loughborough now. Let me see how it is worded."

Dennis passed her the letter without comment, then he filled his pipe and waited. There was a note of disappointment in Mabel's voice, none of rancour.

"It's only for you. What a pity! 'Diana Wayne.' She must be his married sister, the one that lost her husband in India. So sad, they had only been married three or four years, and there was no heir. I recollect Fanny telling me there was no heir. She has only just come back to England. She was with Lord and Lady Carew for ever so long. Lady Carew was her cousin, and ill all the time. He held some position in Egypt, I forget what, and couldn't get away, so Lady Diana travelled back with her and her cousin. I thought she must be a thoroughly nice woman when I heard that. You've never met her, have you? How strange of them to ask you like this."

"I meet Lord Loughborough very often, at Christie's, and other salerooms, he is quite a connoisseur. He has some Watteau drawings he wants me to go through."

"A business dinner, I see. I thought it funny of them to invite a married man without his wife."

"Probably they don't even know I have a wife."

He was stung into saying that, he hardly knew why. The invitation was unexpected, surprising. He had thought he might have bored her that afternoon, feared lest he had stayed too long. He roused himself to hear what Mabel was saying; her feelings must not be hurt because she was not included in the invitation.

"Oh, don't you think so? Don't you think they know you are married? I should say Mr. Merritt had told them about us. Fanny expects Lady Diana will call upon her. She *will* be surprised to hear you are going there to dinner."

"Then you don't mind if I accept?"

"Of course not; I do so hope you will enjoy it. I must send your best dress suit to be pressed? I can have it done in the neighbourhood. And ties, there are some new sort of ties for evening wear. Green and Edwards keep them all ready made up. You do worry so about getting your ties right. Is there anything else you might want? I'm quite free for shopping or anything. Roddy isn't coming this morning, he's seeing father about his agreement. You know everything is arranged; father has got the theatre."

Dennis was able to protect his dress suit from the local tailor, and himself from the indignity of a ready-made bow from Green and Edwards, but he could not prevent Mabel's betraying to Fanny her innocent pleasure in the honour done to her husband.

"I did so hope Lady Diana had called on you by now, and that you were going too. It would have been so nice for Dennis to meet some one there he knew. He and Ted always find plenty to say to each other," was almost her

first observation when they met as usual on Sunday evening at Fitzjohn's Hall.

To say Fanny was surprised that Dennis had been invited to dine in Curzon Street expressed her feelings very mildly. But, after a moment to collect herself, of which Mabel noticed nothing, her mendacity was equal to the occasion, and she said, languidly, that they were "engaged for next Wednesday."

The interval between the arrival of the invitation and its materialisation into the dinner found that curious new restlessness of Dennis considerably accentuated. At Sunningdale on Sunday he played worse than he had ever played since he had begun to take golf seriously. The fourth hole took him five strokes, bogey being three, and four his own worst effort up to then; he sliced his ball on the next tee, and missed a putt of a foot that a child could have holed. Wilfred Small chaffed him and said he must be in love. Dennis resented that; for Small knew Mabel and often came to the house; it was an infernally stupid thing to have said. He told him so, and Small apologised; he had not meant any harm, he said, it was only a joke. Of course every one knew the Skipper was a saint! Dennis played rather better in the afternoon round, but still hopelessly below his form.

On Monday the annual stock-taking at the Gallery should have begun, but neither Mr. Dolland nor the accountants found the senior partner of any practical value. The walls of the office shut him in and stifled him; he went home early.

It has been already told that in his idle hours Dennis made architectural drawings, studied Gwilt, and thought if he had his time to come over again he would have gone in seriously for the one art for which he could claim to have any talent. He had often been in Mr. Garner's house and revelled in its perfections. But this Monday night before

the dinner party, he replaced Gwilt with Browning. She had talked to him about Browning that afternoon; it would be awkward if she started on it again on Wednesday, and he could neither verify her quotations nor cap them. He had never neglected the poets, and there were some lines of Browning that had always appealed to him.

> *"And I shall find my slab of basalt there*
> *And 'neath my tabernacle take my rest,*
> *With those nine columns round me two and two,*
> *The odd one at my feet where Anselm stands.*
> *Peach-blossom marble all, the rare the ripe*
> *As fresh poured red wine of a mighty pulse."*

But

> *"Was it something said, something done that moved him,*
> *Touch of hand, turn of head"*

was new to him, and he did not know where he should look for it. "Any Wife to Any Husband" again; she had spoken of that.

Upstairs his own wife was pounding away at the 'Charles Auchester' music. He wondered what she could see in Roddy Ainsworth. He had had him re-elected at Hendon to "The Grasshoppers," paid his entrance fee out of his own pocket, but the fellow had shown no gratitude. He got up late, "fugging" all the mornings, lunching with women, women of Connie Lander's sort, when he was not "squalling" with Mabel. He went to matinées! When he had reached that last point in Roddy's iniquities, he abandoned him and turned again to Browning. "Any Wife to Any Husband."

> *"And hadst thou only heard me play one tune."*

He could find no other line in the whole poem that was appropriate to himself and Mabel.

Lady Diana now; *Diana!* He wondered quite idly and irrelevantly on what terms she had been with her husband. He was years older than she, he had heard. He wondered also if it was quite settled that she was going to marry Lord Haverford. He could not credit it, it seemed impossible. That beautiful girl! She had the figure of a girl, and a girl's eyes.

Dennis had to practise his drawing, he was a man of regular habits, and each evening in his study he spent an hour or so before he went to bed deftly drawing lines, measuring, adjusting, correcting. To-night, when he had put aside Browning, and settled to the drawing-board, he found to his surprise that he was reproducing a wavy mass of dark hair, a delicate line of pencilled brow over radiant eyes, a firm chin with a cleft in it, curved lips that laughed. He tore them all up before he went to bed. But he read his letter again. It was such an unusual handwriting, clear and upright, without curves or flourishes, and yet feminine.

"DEAR MR. PASSIFUL,

My father and I will be so pleased if you could dine with us on Wednesday the 7th inst. at 8.30. I hope you are disengaged.

Yours sincerely,

DIANA V. WAYNE."

He liked the complete simplicity of it. She was unusual altogether, very simple, he thought, although so companionable and intelligent. The sort of woman a man would like for a pal, to whom he could talk as one could to a fellow of one's own tastes and pursuits. None of his men friends knew anything about Art, and, of course, one could not talk shop at home. He had never admitted it to himself before, but to-night he thought it was pretty

rotten that he had not a soul to whom he could talk of the things that interested him; outside Bond Street at least. But the men to whom he talked in business were interested in commercial and not artistic values. He would like to see more of Lady Diana. He could tell her where there was some quite remarkably early Staffordshire figures and groups.

If Dennis Passiful, wandering through his enchanted garden, had reached a river and embarked upon it, drifting in a direction where at any moment the current might seize him, carry him off his strong feet, engulf and drown him, he was in extraordinary ignorance of his danger. He recalled where he had seen the Staffordshire, tore up all his drawings, yawned, and proceeded to lock up the house. Then he went to bed.

CHAPTER XIII

THE night of the dinner party came at last. Mabel seemed much more excited about it than her husband, sitting with him whilst he dressed, exclaiming, and really exercised in her mind over the number of ties he discarded. She made more than one effort to persuade him to wear the waistcoat buttons her father had given him for Christmas, she had actually, in fact, put them in before he came upstairs. He was sorry to disappoint her, but he did not want to make himself conspicuous. She said she was sure he was right, and hastened to replace them. After the momentous waistcoat button matter was decided, and in fear of the argument in favour of the ready made ties, he asked her how the rehearsals of "Charles Auchester" were getting on, and if Roddy was not very glad Oliver Orchard was back in his part and that he could devote himself to his own play.

The change of conversation proved a complete success, and Dennis listened to an account of an attempt on the part of the producer of the play to cut out one of Roddy's songs, and of Mr. Merritt's callousness over the matter. He said more than once that he was sure it would 'come out' all right; he hoped she would not have a dull evening without him; he gave her that perfunctory good-bye kiss that was never omitted between them. He was off at last.

The progress of the cab seemed now too slow, and now too fast. He was afraid at first of being too late, and then of being too early. But he was there punctually to the hour.

Giving up his coat, following his name into the drawing room, his outward self-possession was complete. But it

was rather as if it were a dream he was enacting, and there were shadow figures about him. But one figure was no dream. To-night Lady Diana was in white. It was the first time he had seen her out of mourning, and above the pellucid eyes and the pencilled brows, on the dark hair, there was a small coronal of diamonds; swaying and scintillating as if a breath played about them. The rope of pearls around her slender throat was caught up on the white dress with more scintillating diamonds. But in the radiant depths of the pellucid eyes as they met his own Dennis saw diamond stars that dulled all the others.

"How nice to see you again! You are taking in Lady Irene Thorneycroft, the little girl over there in green chiffon and white water-lilies. She will amuse you. . . ."

Before Dennis had time to be disappointed dinner was announced, and he found himself following his hostess from a distance into the dining-room. When he was able to look about him he saw that the table was round; over the low massed bank of roses he recognised representatives of both Houses, and resplendent ladies whose names and faces were familiar to him from the society papers. The mere absence of the communal meal gave a pleasant zest to the viands. Dennis only knew this instinctively, it was only with his superficial satisfaction that he was concerned at the moment. He knew that the atmosphere was agreeable and that the lace and linen of the napery, the heavy cut glass and old silver, were harmonious with his feelings. He could not be supposed to know that notwithstanding the poverty of which he complained, Lord Loughborough prided himself justly upon his cook, that the menu had been submitted to him, and that his approval was as valuable as the first hall mark, that the wines were worthy of the dishes, and of the house's reputation.

Dennis had taken in Lady Irene Thorneycroft. She was small and fair and in her fourth season, playing at an

ingenuousness which was supposed to be suitable to her style of prettiness.

"I know you'll think me very silly," was her favourite opening conversation. Under cover of it she said whatever came into her head, and expected to be excused if it was impertinent or indecorous. Her two elder sisters had married well, there were three in the schoolroom waiting emancipation. Up to now she had disappointed expectation. She was certainly pretty, fashionably vapid and apparently amiable. Yet she had hung fire; such things do happen, even in the best families, and she was avid to restore her fading prestige before next season should bring her sister Blanche's still more youthful charms to vie with hers. The Duchess left no stone unturned, no assembly unfrequented, and Irene seconded her efforts unremittingly. She met the same people again and again, that was the worst of it. Everybody knew how essential it was that she should get married before Blanche was presented. Lately she had thought that men avoided her in consequence. Perhaps her artlessness palled. Dennis was wholly new; eligible, or he would hardly have been here, near to the hostess, too. He was very good looking, that much Irene saw. In the language of the proletariat whose manners she aped, Lady Irene 'set about' him. She aired all her little graces and ingenuousness. She looked up and looked down, shrugged her pretty little shoulders, and asked impertinent questions. She talked of Ranelagh and Hurlingham, huntin' and cubbing; of Aix, where they had been in the summer, of Cannes, where they went in the winter. She held Dennis's attention by sheer force of her volubility.

He was always and above everything conscious of Lady Diana talking in that low musical voice of hers to the man who had taken her in to dinner. She had no time to spare for him as yet; but that she should have placed him near her was enough, and more than enough. He played

his part with Irene, finding the daughter of the Duchess astonishingly little different from the Hampstead and Hendon maidens who had honoured him with their attentions in times gone by. He could hold his own in the little social comedy through which Lady Irene pirouetted. But never without the knowledge that Diana was there, her graciousness all about him. Now and again she found opportunity for a word. If it were about nothing, a wine or a dish, it was evidence that she knew he was there, that she had not forgotten him. Once their eyes met, and what she read in his contented her so well that she spoke no more to him whilst the dinner was in progress. She left him to Irene, knowing that her turn would come.

There were two Cabinet Ministers at the table as well as Lord Rosenstein, Dolly Haverford, her brother Mervyn, Cosmo, a couple of young Guardsmen, Sir Adrian Rostand. None of these could boast Dennis's good looks, nor the same quality of understanding. She was satisfied with him in these surroundings. Her father need not have spoken of taking Dennis Passiful 'out of his class' by asking him to dinner. If there was a social difference between him — for already he was "him" to her — and the others, there was no doubt he benefited by the comparison. His carriage was finer, his shoulders broader. He looked more of a man than the Guardsmen or her brother. He was certainly better groomed than the statesman by her side, with his over-long hair and indifferent tailoring, than the other Cabinet Minister, with his square head and coarse hands. Diana had a cultivated eye, and the shining lights of the Liberal party failed to satisfy it.

"There will be bridge presently; if you don't play, we can talk. Come up soon," she contrived to say to Dennis, under cover of the movement of the ladies from the table.

He heard it, although he was groping for Irene's fan, handkerchief, and a trinket or two that she had contrived

to drop. He emerged cool from the ordeal, and as he stood up to let them pass, both Irene and Diana noted he was a good inch taller than any of the men present, and beyond that in good looks.

When the men were alone, chairs were drawn closer, and instead of chatter there was conversation. Dennis had a momentary doubt as to his inclusion in this circle, where everyone seemed to know everybody else, and he might well be deemed something of an outsider. But Lord Haverford's last term at Harrow happened to have been that very eventful summer when Dennis made his historic two centuries at Lord's, defeating Eton for the third time in succession. Haverford could not stand the Guardsmen, who under the lead of Mervyn had a disagreeable way of chaffing him, nor yet the politicians, who were all on the wrong side, outsiders; men who had not been at public Schools nor University. He drew his chair up to Dennis and began to talk about "The Hill." He had all the devotion to his old school of the lower boy who has never been translated. Two or three ignominious years and a superannuation had left him with an enthusiasm for Harrow exceeding Dennis's own. He asked after numerous boys who had been prefects or uppers in his own time. He recalled the famous cricket match, and the "rag" that followed, confiding in Dennis that he never missed going back on speech day, when he sang "Willow the King," and "Follow on," and "Forty Years After."

"I get all worked up, give you my word; often find myself devilish nearly blubbing. There's something in the old place. . . ."

By the time he remembered that he wanted Dennis's advice about the armour at Thorpe, he had grown sentimental, and called him "old pal." But then something of that must be laid to the account of Loughborough's '87 port on the top of 1898 Giesler and undated but superb Lafite.

Mervyn asked who was the fellow Dolly was "burbling" over, and Cosmo, giving his name only, made him known to his brother, and the other youngsters. They all began to talk cricket, but the raucous voice of the Cabinet Minister, and the desire for information of his colleague, interrupted them. The gentleman with the long hair was very like Rosa Dartle. He "wanted to know" so many things; detail of the working of the last army order for instance, with which of course the young army men were completely ignorant. He "wanted to know" from Lord Haverford how the Government valuation of land worked in his district. Haverford answered shortly:

"Rottenly! What did you expect?"

Haverford did not even take the trouble to be polite, grumbling in an audible aside to Dennis that this was the first time he had dined here since Loughborough had begun to spell for an Earldom; a false accusation with a basis of truth in it. Lord Loughborough had thrown in his lot with the Liberal party when Mr. Chamberlain offended his social prejudices. That the last state was worse than the first he would have admitted, retracing his steps, but that the opposition of his family had aroused his obstinacy.

"I wouldn't have come now if Diana hadn't made a point of it. Dashed low fellows, these Liberals. My father told me once he never met a Liberal in a gentleman's drawing-room, always thought they should be kept to the kitchen quarters, seen 'em driving about their constituencies with frowsy-headed wives, but never had his legs under the same mahogany. Don't know what he'd have said to my sittin' down with these. My hat!" He glanced at the long-haired one with aversion.

But now it was Dennis's turn to be questioned. In the intervals of his flamboyant oratory the Cymric Samson devoted himself to the fair sex, and the way Dennis absorbed the attention of Lady Irene, and attracted that of Lady

Diana, somewhat upset his slender veneer of good manners. Lord Rosenstein, deep in art gossip with his host, had called on Dennis once or twice for a date or a description, and this gave the clue to his calling. Following on the inquiry to Haverford about the new land duties, he engineered the talk to the super-tax.

"I suppose it is not very popular in Bond Street? The incomes there are more often over than under £5,000 a year?" he asked quickly, those shallow bright eyes of his sharp for the answer. Already he was restless with the desire to find new fields to exploit, new sources to supply incomes for the henchmen of the party.

Dennis who, like most cricketers, had the love of his country at heart, and resented its exploitation for the benefit of politicians kept in their places by the votes of disloyalists, answered coolly:

"It has given us some trouble, but on the whole we have, I believe, all found it economical. By an alteration in our system of keeping accounts, and a re-distribution of assets from various sources, all the men I know whose incomes are over £5,000 a year, are paying less than they did before the imposition of the tax."

The long-haired one wanted an argument on this point, and to prove it impossible. But Lord Loughborough suggested joining the ladies. His political guests were probably as uncongenial to him as they were to the others, and he deprecated any discussion after meals. It was only the presence of the ladies that had prevented friction before this.

Meanwhile, in the drawing-room, the ladies had separated into congenial groups. Lady Irene sat down by Mrs. Spencer Trefusis, gambolled youthfully about her, played with the fringes of her scarf, and possessed herself of her fan. Mrs. Spencer Trefusis had nothing to offer society but her extraordinary knowledge of its affairs. There

was nobody she met of whose private history she remained ignorant. Her gossip, elliptical, and sometimes erroneous, was generally voted 'most amusin',' and Mrs. Trefusis herself was an ever welcome guest. Irene soon began to pump her about Dennis Passiful. Diana, listening to them a moment, in the intervals of endeavouring to keep Aunt Mary from relapsing into slumber, thought that of Dennis Passiful at least Mrs. Spencer Trefusis could have no special information. He could never have swum in the waters where she fished so indefatigably. But, to her surprise, the contrary proved the case.

"Young Passiful! Oh yes! Rollin' in money, simply rollin'. Old Abinger, a Jew, my dear, millionaire person, adopted him, left him a fortune. He's made another for himself. Pierpont Morgan never buys a thing without him; he does all Rosenstein's commissions. Quite a romance! Nobody knows who his mother was," then she dropped her voice, "but she was one of us. I've heard stories; I should not be surprised if it was that daughter of Ridgeways, who was supposed to have died abroad. She talked about art a great deal, I remember, before she ran away; for there is no doubt she *did* run away. They were killed in a motor accident, or on a Swiss mountain; it might have been the earthquake in Sicily; it's a long time ago. The boy was brought up by a parson. Parson joined the Roman Catholic Church. Old Abe thought it shockin'. Don't know why Jews think it is shockin' to be a Roman, but they do. He's a good-lookin' young fellow. I'll ask Ridgeways about his daughter; he wouldn't mind owning up to such a fine young grandson. All the legitimate ones are wasters. Shall I ask him?"

"Oh, no! You have told us quite enough!" This was from Diana, hastily, but Irene was not nearly satisfied.

"Do you think he has a million of money, too, all of his

own? Why does he go on selling things if he's so rich?" Irene questioned ingenuously.

"But, my dear, don't you know that nobody is ever rich enough. And they say he buys things for himself now, collects them. A girl might do worse, a great deal worse than go in for young Percival — Passival did you say he called himself? Well, it's no odds. Nobody thinks anything of the bar sinister now-a-days. Why, they do say the Prince . . ." She lowered her voice again, whilst telling her awed young audience, who had however no interest whatever in the gossip, of a morganatic alliance that was being suggested for the heir to the throne. She *did* speak in a whisper, so it would perhaps be indecorous to play the eavesdropper.

Irene listened and was rewarded with more talk about Mr. Passiful. When she realised what was expected of her, Mrs. Trefusis was glad to gratify the Duchess's daughter. She commented on Dennis's attentions during dinner, and gave instances of girls who had been happy, or sufficiently happy, with foreign bankers, old South African millionaires, and even stockbrokers. Encouraging Irene to her new folly, she found herself with two listeners. The effort to keep Aunt Mary awake had failed, and Diana was heeding her words; they were making an impression upon her, too, which was stranger.

Diana had been conscious as she had sat by Dennis's side during dinner of a decided accession of interest in him. And if Irene, who was the daughter of a Duke, could look upon Dennis Passiful as eligible, if Mrs. Spencer Trefusis could encourage her in it, why should she, Diana, who was only the daughter of a Liberal peer, and that a poor one, relegate him to the ranks of the desirable impossibilities? Her thoughts travelled quickly as she listened to Mrs. Trefusis talking. Why should she marry Dolly, who bored her to distraction, who always said the same things with

the same vacuity of expression? Dolly was rich, but most of his money was in land. She had heard him say over and over again that he shouldn't be surprised if, before the Liberals got out, they'd grabbed most of what belonged to him to pay themselves salaries. And the events of the last session seemed likely to justify his fears. She need not marry for position; for her position was assured. She must marry for money. But why should it be Haverford's money?

It was when she arrived at this point in her meditations that the men came into the room. Then she had to do her duty by her father's most distinguished guests; she had no time for Dennis Passiful, nor to wonder about him. The Cymric Samson held her hand a little longer than necessary, paid her compliments; the wrong ones, and wrongly expressed. Certainly if caste had any meaning, or good manners any significance, Dennis Passiful had more right amongst them than he. Fortunately there was a semi-official reception to-night at Lady Sabury's, and the Ministers left early, to everyone's relief. Then some sat down to cards, and the young men made a move to the billiard-room. Irene had secured Dennis for a few moments by the simple process of calling out to him:

"Do come and be introduced to Mrs. Spencer Trefusis, Mr. Passiful. She has just been telling me all about you. I want to know if any of it is true; it is so romantic."

"Mrs. Trefusis prides herself on her inaccuracy," Cosmo murmured, as he replaced Irene in the seat beside her. "Don't you? Let Irene chatter whilst you tell me what you have invented romantic about our young Lancelot. His adopted father was an old friend of my mother's; and she always insisted that the boy was his own."

Mrs. Spencer Trefusis said Cosmo was delightfully wicked, and what did he think of that affair of the Abercrombies? Cosmo had an idea of making a study of Mrs.

Spencer Trefusis for a play. Miss Compton was the actress he had in mind. He stayed by her for quite a long time, letting her tell him old or new scandal.

Dennis had no choice but to listen to Irene, who had practically buttonholed him. But from where he stood he watched Diana's movements.

Fortunately the Duchess was no bridge player, and she soon swept her daughter away, leaving Dennis free for Diana. They had a word or two, but other guests again intervened. Of Haverford, later on, it was more difficult to rid themselves. He had forgotten about the armour in his revived interest in old Harrovian days. Now he gave Dennis quite a cordial invitation to Thorpe. He said that when he was married he should take more interest in the County Cricket, and Dennis must come down there and help him with it. Diana's tact was ultimately equal to the occasion.

"You must go and play billiards, Dolly. Cossy ought to be downstairs, but he will never tear himself away from Mrs. Trefusis. I've promised to show Mr. Passiful the old temple, and the winter garden."

Lord Haverford did not want to play billiards, and did not know how to play bridge. He wanted to detain Diana, and make her share his thin enthusiasm, whilst he talked to Dennis about cricket. It was part of the perquisites of his position that she should stay and listen. It was with difficulty she deprived him of them. It was Cosmo who came to her assistance, when Mrs. Trefusis left, with a suggestion that if Dolly did not care to play billiards he had better come down for a whisky and soda. Cosmo was always on the watch lest Haverford should jeopardise the position he had won with such difficulty.

"Come and have a drink, Dolph; Di will let you off for half an hour."

He trusted to Lord Haverford's thirst to make the rest

easy. He saw Diana was anxious to get rid of him. He looked at Dennis and his sister curiously, nevertheless. He *had* wondered how he came to be there, would have wondered, perhaps, even if Fanny had not talked to him about it, and shown her surprise.

CHAPTER XIV

THERE are small houses and large in Curzon Street. But the one that had been occupied by the Loughboroughs from time immemorial, where Fox and the "First Gentleman of Europe" had often made merry, where Parisot had danced, and Mario sung, was the largest of them all. The conservatory, or winter garden, for it more nearly merited the latter description, was celebrated for the model of a classic temple, in stone, many columned and correct; in its beautiful verisimilitude giving no suggestion that it was without an interior, and that it was put up to disguise the wall that led to the stables. To-night the classic temple was lighted by electricity; the points twinkled also amongst the great oleanders, the orange trees, and palms that had been the hobby of Diana's grandfather to cultivate in these strange quarters. The air was warm among the scented exotics and the palms and foliage of the small pleasaunce, and in the artificial warm dusk of its verdure were chairs and dallying places for lovers.

Dennis and Diana were not lovers, but they were glad to be alone, to compare notes of the dinner party, to talk about themselves and each other. Dennis had an idea that he was in luck in receiving so much attention from his hostess. If he found his pulses less even than usual, he put it down to the wine he had drunk. He knew he had a level head; she was of course extraordinarily beautiful, and wonderfully kind to him. Perhaps he was a little embarrassed, but flattered certainly, exhilarated, almost excited.

"Let us sit down here."

That was after they had exhausted the obvious, displaying to each other their invincible Toryism, and distaste for the manners and habits of the present Government. Dennis was quite satisfied to sit beside her, he was never a very talkative man.

"Was all Mrs. Trefusis told us true?" she asked him, presently.

"I don't know what she told you."

"That there was a romance about your parenthood."

"I never knew either my father or mother, but I never heard there was anything romantic or extraordinary about them. Mr. Paighton said he had an idea at one time that Passiful was not my father's real name. It is rather an uncommon one. He would have made it famous if he had lived."

He spoke again about the sketches of the Heath, and about the portrait of his mother.

"You have never tried to find out?"

"Why should I? A man is what he makes himself."

"And you?" Her voice was very soft. "You have made yourself a place."

"I! I've tried to play the game."

He was shy of talking about himself, almost awkward, pleased nevertheless at her interest in him, but not anxious to exploit it. He said another word or two about how good Mr. Paighton had been to him, and about the two old maids.

"But without a mother or a father! You must have always missed something in the world." Her soft sympathetic voice seemed to touch him somewhere, and in a way that he had never before been touched.

"I'm not missing anything now." He hardly knew why he said it.

"No! You think Irene pretty, don't you? She is considered pretty."

"I haven't thought about her at all."

It was very blunt, but in revolt at his own quickened feelings, and the way her voice touched him, he took refuge in abruptness.

"She talked a lot. I suppose she is what you call awfully up to date. I don't know much about girls," he added.

"Don't you? That is rather strange. You are not a misogynist, surely?"

"No, but girls are all so alike."

He was not distinguishing himself, he felt that; he felt too, a new difficulty in expressing himself.

"I never thought of that! You would rather then have gone down to the billiard room with Cossy and Dolly?"

"You know I wouldn't." That was better. "You know I like talking to you."

"Do you? I thought you would, but then I wasn't quite sure. It is girls only, then, that are so much alike, not widows."

"I don't think of you as a widow."

"You do think of me, then? No, I didn't mean to say that. It sounds coquettish. You and I . . . we talk more sensibly than that, don't we? Flirtation is what you mean when you say all girls are alike."

"I know I have never met anyone in the least like you."

"Haven't you? But I am really just like other people. I think it is you who are different!"

Of course Diana knew the game she was playing; single, married, or widowed, she had never played any other. Dennis fell easily into the trap, and asked her in what way she found him different from other fellows. Then she talked about him, and he about her, and one after another the lamps about them went out, and the strange exotic garden sent out its perfumes. Dennis thought it all amazingly pleasant, exciting even. Diana thought him a little slow,

a little deliberate, but she had no doubt the pace would quicken presently, when she desired it, in fact.

"Do you believe in friendship between man and woman?" she asked him presently.

"Rather."

"Do you think you and I are going to be friends?"

"It's too good to be true," Dennis answered quickly, caught unawares.

"But why?"

"I am so ordinary, when you get to know me you would get bored."

"I don't think so, I don't feel like that yet, anyway. I'm not at all bored, rather the contrary."

"I have never had a woman friend."

She did not quite know why he was harping on the word friendship. She did not want to think him "raw," although that was the word that might have seemed appropriate. And really he was extraordinarily good looking. They had been sitting under the shadow of one of the great palms. Now he got up, walked away a few paces, came back again. As he came back, one of the electric lamps, blown out from some unknown cause, for the night was perfectly still, burst into light again. Its illumination fell whitely on her white dress. He did not know what was affecting him, nor how he was affected. She looked more like a statue than ever with the white light on her face.

"You are perfectly beautiful!" The words broke from him. She laughed, but it was quite a little laugh, low, and the note in it was more thrilling than gay. She had meant him to make love to her, yet here he was standing upright, and quite still, only telling her that she was beautiful. She knew it, had known it since she was a child. It was not to hear this that she had come into the garden with him.

"You say you have never had a woman friend." She was not going to let him make her nervous; nervousness

was the name she gave to what was new and strange to her in her own feelings. "But you have been in love?"

"I don't believe I ever have," he said, more quickly. She waited for him to add "until now." But instead, he said, as if it had little to do with the matter, was something quite extraneous to it: "I married, of course, but, but that is not quite the same thing." Again that curious sense of unreality oppressed him.

He had not actually said it, but she understood that, although he was married, he had never been in love. He grew hot when he realised what he had said, for it seemed to be unfair to Mabel. But he had not been in love with Mabel, not exactly in love. Love in that sort of sense must carry one off one's feet, one must feel intoxicated, uplifted. As he thought of it he could not trust himself to look at his companion. It was very still out here, the shadows deep, and the light fitful.

Diana had not known he was married, had not guessed, nor foreseen it. Her heart gave a leap, what a fool she had been! Then it quieted down.

"I did not know you were married," she said, quite easily.

"I have been married five years."

Idly she wondered what it was to her, rather dully she wondered what concern it was of hers. Was she not going to marry Dolly, in six months; at the end of the season? Then she pulled herself together. Her mind worked quickly, and she saw all at once it was a good thing, an excellent thing, that he was married. It made playing with him so safe. One could go on playing; there might be a spice of danger, exhilarating, bringing now and again that quick heart beat, but on the whole it was safe.

"I did not know it. But you say you have never had a woman friend? I don't think I understand."

"It seems to me I have never known anything about

women until now." He was breathless and felt he was making a fool of himself. "When I first saw you, at the theatre that night, looking like a statue, Pygmalion's statue come to life, or one of the Venuses, I thought you were the first woman I had ever seen, really looked at. . ." He had sat down beside her again, his head silhouetted against the lighted columns of the temple. "So that if you do give me your friendship, honour me with your friendship," what he was saying seemed extraordinarily foolish, and he hurried on, moved by his own folly, and inconsequent, "I don't know what I could do to deserve it, but there isn't anything I wouldn't do."

The place, the warm and scented air, the unusual circumstances and hour were responsible for his stupidity, he knew that he was being quite unpardonably stupid.

"You have only seen me three times altogether."

"Four. I saw you one night when you were coming home from the theatre."

"But you didn't speak to me."

"No, I did not want to. I was satisfied with having seen you."

"But surely I am not the only woman with whom you have ever wished to be on friendly terms?"

"On the terms I want to be with you? Yes, you are."

"It is extraordinary you have never cared for a woman, or a woman for you," she persisted, speaking slowly. It was impossible, incredible; she hardly knew what it was he was trying to tell her.

"I don't want to make myself out better than I am. It's a question of, of temperament, I suppose." He shied over the word, it was like Fanny, had something mawkish and sentimental about it. "Perhaps I have not the same faculty of idealisation as other fellows. I've known a good many girls and women, of course. I should not care if I never saw one of them again."

Because she was pleased, she answered lightly, she tried even to banter him, but liked his seriousness so well that it seemed a pity to change the note.

"It is really very flattering." She rose from her seat. "But now I think, it is time we went in." He put himself deliberately in her path.

"Don't go for a moment. Tell me, is it possible?" And then because he was conscious of his inexperience, and hardly knew what he wanted, yet wanted it uncommonly, was afraid of bungling, and more afraid of his fear, he hurried on:

"Is friendship between man and woman possible? You said it was; just now you said it was. Would I be worthy?"

He was still standing in her path. He was really curiously unlike any other man she had ever met; but certainly he had the power of making her heart beat fast, and no other man who had made love to her before her husband's death, or since, had hesitated to use such a power when he discovered it.

"I must think it over."

Everything was just as it should be, for now there was a touch of imperativeness in his manner.

"No! No! You must tell me now." He caught hold of her hand, surprised at himself. "I must know."

Standing with him like that, for half an instant, her hand supine in his, she had nothing to say. And her silence mounted to his head as words might have failed to do.

"I could not bear to think we were not going to meet again, talk together! You must promise me that. Is it too much to ask? There *is* something different between us, isn't there, something different from what we feel with other people?" She made a little exclamation at that, but he took no heed of the interruption. "From the first we were not like ordinary acquaintances; I don't know what it is!"

It really seemed that he did not know he was making love to her, although he was doing it so well. And she left her hand in his, some magnetism there was in him, communicating itself to her, until her hand felt hot in his, and she was conscious of a curious agitation. It was only for her friendship he was pleading, not for her love, or leave to win it. An instant she stood silent, and he, eager for her answer, holding her hand. Then the spell was broken.

"You know I am going to marry my cousin, Lord Haverford. Cosmo has told you?"

"Yes, no, I can't remember. That has nothing to do with it. Only I do want to see you again, and often."

"It is getting so late."

"But say before you go that we shall meet again, that I haven't offended you, that you meant what you said about friendship between man and woman, and that you are going to give me yours. Say it." And then he added, in reaction from his own vehemence: "It would be so . . . so splendid of you."

"Would it?"

Certainly he did his wooing strangely, if this were wooing. What surprised her most was her own pleasure in it.

"I really must go in now." She said it hastily, almost nervously, as a girl might if an impetuous boy was making hot love to her and the experience was new.

"But it is all right between us; you are not offended?"

"Of course it is all right." She laughed a little unsteadily.

"And we *are* going to be friends?"

"The best of friends;" this time her laughter was light; "why not?"

"It is awfully good of you."

His heart was high as he followed her; hers was in a tumult, although she was telling herself all the time that it was ridiculous, simply ridiculous. He made love like a

boy, and it was men, men who knew every move in the game and played it as well, or better than she did, with whom such pastime was amusing. But he was so frank, and unusual. What could she do with him, he was outside her own circle and ways? But even whilst she hesitated she felt that this was not the end. And when he gave her his hand again to assist her up the steps, the grasp of his hand again gave her that thrill, a message of which she could not misunderstand the significance; although it was with difficulty she believed it.

It was anti-climax when they came in, to find that the bridge and billiard parties had both broken up, and Haverford, looking very sulky, and, if the truth must be told, a little less than sober, was lounging on the sofa waiting for their return. Dennis did not wish to linger, the evening was over for him. He was amazingly happy, and more amazingly ignorant of the reason of it. He had had a delightful evening. He would rather not have left Haverford there with her. But Cosmo was there also.

Cosmo looked with some curiosity, and more amusement, at his sister when she came in from the garden with Dennis. He knew Dennis's attraction for women, and thought that Diana might do him a great deal of good. It was not any slight to Fanny he wished to avenge, but Dennis was really too '*unco guid.*' He suspected his sister of a capacity to make Dennis Passiful realise that his outlook on life had been hitherto rather limited. Naturally Cosmo did not care if there should be trouble for Dennis in this new knowledge. Neither did he for a moment suspect Diana of being in any danger. There was the light in Dennis's eyes that there had been on his wedding day, as if something wonderful had been happening to him, and Cosmo was certainly amused.

"I did not think you were such a botanist, Passiful," he said lightly. "You must have examined every plant. I

suspect Diana gave you the history of the Auricula my uncle imported from Florida, and the Acanthus that blossomed the night George of Wales dined here in 1794, and never before nor since."

He wanted to cover Haverford's sulkiness; but he need not have feared that it would affect his sister.

"You still here, Dolly," she said, as if in surprise, as she came in. "I thought you went away hours ago."

He mumbled something under his breath, something that sounded like: "So it seemed."

She looked at him with uplifted eyebrow and inquiry, and he pulled himself together. The next mumble may have been an apology. He stood up irresolutely; Dennis was waiting to say good-bye, and for a moment they were side by side. Dolly was slightly fuddled, and in his vacuous face his little eyes were bloodshot. He blinked with them under the retreating forehead, and his lips hung sulkily, the mouth a little open. Dennis was half a head taller, and as he stood she saw how muscular was his grace.

"Why did you wait? Has every one else gone? But it was very nice of you to wait and say good-night to me."

If it were that for which he was waiting he was in no haste to carry out his intention. He stood his ground whilst Dennis said his brief farewell; was still standing it when the door closed behind him. But to her it seemed the room had grown suddenly dull and empty, and when Dolly began to talk, she yawned openly, yawned in his face.

"Isn't it almost bed time?" she asked. Dolly had always a way of overstaying his welcome, she thought. "I don't know why, but it has seemed an unusually long evening. Did we dine earlier than usual, Cossy? Of course we did. I've just remembered those sort of people," this was her disrespectful way of alluding to the Liberal Ministers, "are used to dining in the middle of the day. Father

said it was not to be later than eight. What is the time now, Cossy? I'm sure it is to-morrow, or the day after."

"You have been sitting for an hour with that fellow in the conservatory."

It was Cosmo's presence that gave him the courage to say it, and her look of surprise made him feel a fool. She had a way of making him feel a fool. She yawned again:

"An hour, was it? I thought you were so interested in that armour of yours. We were talking about it, and Mr. Passiful will go down to see it himself. But perhaps you've changed your mind again."

Her tone was indifferent or scornful; and it really seemed as if she were sleepy.

"How did I know you were talking about the armour? I've been waitin' for the chance of a word with you . . ."

"You must make allowances for him," Cosmo struck in, "it is love from which he is suffering, a bad attack. He scents a rival in your new armourer. I should not be surprised if presently he resents your groom."

Cosmo's wit was double barrelled, the eyes of brother and sister met, and hers were interrogative; the lines around his were wrinkled in humour. Had he meant to convey to her that Dennis Passiful was little less removed from her than a groom? She knew better; there were no differences at all between them, or if there were, the advantages were all on his side. In any case she would allow no interference from Cossy in whatever way she chose to amuse herself.

"But Dolly could hardly find a really worthy rival, could he?"

Cosmo, if he did not spare his sister, spared her fiancé no less. He would have taken him away after that, but Dolly had his attacks of weak obstinacy, and one of them was on him now. He paid no heed to Cosmo's suggestion that 'it was really time to toddle.' And Diana's obvious impatience had little more effect.

"You never give me a word. Other fellows can have tête-à-têtes with you. You put me off, and laugh at me; you're always laughing at me. You've promised to marry me. . . ."

"But not to-night, surely."

"There you go, laughing at me again!"

And then, ignoring Cosmo, he burst out:

"You know how frightfully fond I am of you. No one knows better than me how rippin' you look to-night, and all that. But you ought to say how much longer I've got to wait. Why should you go on putting me off?"

This was the sort of crisis she was for ever staving off, just now especially it seemed insufferable. It was no longer an interrogative look she gave to her brother, it was an impatient one, and meant:

"Can't you get him away?"

Cosmo shook his head. Now Dolly began to pour out his grievances, her many unkindnesses to him; he choked over them with self pity. It really was jealousy he was feeling, although with a weakling, such as he was, even jealousy is weak, showing itself in irresolute complaining.

"Every fellow has more chances than me. He ain't an armourer or a groom; Cossy only said that to put me off. He was in my own house at Harrow. He played for England once."

It was strange that he should defend the man. Diana's heart warmed a little to him.

And then the bloodshot eyes grew redder, and even the lids seemed suffused.

"Cossy thinks I'm a fool to be jealous. It's only because I know I'm not good enough for you, nobody is good enough; but we *are* engaged and I've got my feelings. . . ."

Diana answered hastily:

"Dear old boy! There, don't worry me any more to-night, you are quite good enough; too good, very likely.

And you know I'm really very fond of you. But I can't bear scenes."

She got rid of him eventually. Even he could see that Cosmo did not mean to budge, and that Diana would show no favour before him. Cosmo had laughed when Diana said she was fond of him, and his laugh had cut Dolly like a whip, so that a red mark as of a weal showed in his forehead. There was no use staying after that. The two men went out together. Cosmo had not meant to hurt his cousin. This Haverford marriage was partly of his own contriving, or rather urging, he looked upon it as inevitable, vital to the fortunes of the family. But when he contemplated it close, and from Diana's point of view, he was sorry for her. Not that she would fail to keep even Dolly in order, bring him properly to heel. But it was pretty ghastly to think she must put up with his slobbering affection, go through scenes with him. He felt a sudden sympathy with Diana, hurrying Dolly away. He was satisfied that she must have interludes, respite. Poor Diana! Even Cosmo Merritt had his weak spot, not to be protected by epigram, and Diana was his Achilles' heel.

Left alone, notwithstanding that she had yawned, and spoken of her fatigue, Lady Diana did not immediately go up to bed. She sat on the sofa in the drawing-room some time longer, her hand before her eyes, shutting out the lights, thinking.

He was quite right; it had been different with them from the first, from the very beginning when at the theatre she had surprised his eyes, and the look in them. Why should it not be possible, this friendship of which he had spoken? What friend had she in the whole world? There was Cosmo, but Cosmo urged her to marry Dolly, to marry him soon, to get things settled. She supposed it would come to that, she was up to her ears in debt. But there was no hurry about it. She could think about this friendship, and

what it might mean. It was quite a long time before she remembered the servants wanted to come in and turn out the lights, that her maid was sitting up for her.

The maid was not allowed to waste time over hair-brushing this evening. Diana had hardly the patience to let her finish her essential duties. She wanted to be alone, to dream. She was going to marry Dolly, there was no doubt about that; it was a fact, but one that could not bear thinking of. He — there was only he in her mind at the moment — was already married; and if he had not been, there was the difference in their position! She clung now to the thought of that difference in their position. But friendship now; it was only of friendship they had spoken.

She had dismissed the maid before the finish of the hair-brushing. As she sat before the mirror, thinking of friendship, she could see that her hair was far below her waist, billowing blue black about her bare shoulders. She had not stayed to put on a dressing jacket, and there was little between her and her loveliness. For a fleeting moment, as she saw her image reflected in the glass, the licentiousness of an unbridled imagination swept over her, crimsoning her cheeks. After all she had been a married woman. Only for a moment that unbridled imagination saw two figures in the mirror. Then it was the darkness she needed. Hurriedly she turned out the light and got into bed. But then she found, almost for the first time, that sleep was not at her command. Restlessly she turned from side to side, wooing, almost imploring that reluctant sleep. When at length it came it brought with it dreams that wakened her with pounding heart and hot flushes, the source of which she hardly knew. Yet, when morning dawned, she wished the night could have been prolonged, so that she might dream again.

CHAPTER XV

DENNIS walked home extraordinarily happy, quite persuaded now that all he had ever wanted in life, and for lack of which his days had been empty, was friendship with a woman. And such a woman! He endowed her with qualities of heart and intellect, with a boundless capacity of sympathy, and an understanding of himself, that was almost preternatural. Things she had said to him recurred, they had so many thoughts in common; they both loved beauty, for instance, plastic or natural. She had been to many countries that were unknown to him, she would tell him about them, and he would see them through her eyes. But quite near London there were places to which he could take her, where the gorse was yellow under blue sky, and by lying close on the sheer ground, they could imagine sand dunes, and a slow tidal sea. He had often done it on that wonderful heath of Hampstead where his father had made his pictures. And there were other places, too, for him to show her when the summer came, within a drive, almost within a walk of the metropolis, where they could sit attuning all things made to a green thought in a green shade. Quotations became his own words to-night, and all the poets thronged to help him in his illusion. The world was so beautiful, and hitherto he had looked upon it alone. In the dull, foggy streets, as he went swiftly homeward, he saw picture upon picture, grey beauties of vista and vastness. In Regent's Park, as he passed through, were purple mysterious depths, and bare branches cut black and magnificent against the gloom. To-night, if he had held a pencil in his hand, the architecture he would

draw would be massed splendour of masonry, arches upon arches leading to the light, great groined roofs, painted windows, and arabesqued floors. So the eyes of his mind ran riot, until at length he reached home.

When his key was in the lock he remembered she had been surprised to hear that he was married. Then she had said that she was glad; a strange thing to say, but, in a way, it confirmed and uplifted him. He would not reason about it, he wanted no explanation, almost it explained itself. So he thought in his curious exaltation of spirit. She dwelt in a region apart, no gross thought intruded; this growing, gathering feeling for each other was spiritual; she had been quick to feel it. She was glad he was married. He would tell her one day all about Mabel. How she, too, was all compound of goodness and unselfishness. But, even in his folly, he did not think of bringing them together.

Mabel was waiting up for him. That seemed right and fitting; it was part of her goodness. He felt very kindly towards her. She never varied, he could trust her completely. He did not mean to speak of this friendship that had come into his life. But she would be glad if she knew, she would be glad of anything that added to his happiness. He felt just the same about her. Roddy was quite a good fellow, too, and their music was the bond between them. He had a vague wish, nevertheless, that Roddy had not been an actor, and so inferior in character. It would have been better if Mabel had a friend more like his own. His heart leaped again at the thought of his own.

"I couldn't help waiting up for you, Dennis. Such a dreadful thing has happened!"

That was the way she began, the moment he had got into the house, and whilst he was still thinking it was a pity she had only Roddy Ainsworth and his egotism, as an alternative to painting convolvuli on cheap satin. He was

conscious of pitying her, of being moved to a great tenderness towards her.

"Did you enjoy your evening? You look *so* well. I am sure it is good for you to go out by yourself sometimes."

"What has happened that is so dreadful? *Are* there any dreadful things?" His eyes, smiling so kindly upon her, seemed to question, or deny it, and gave her a dim vision of his mood.

"I do so hate to spoil your evening . . ."

He laughed and said it was all right, she could "fire away" with her news.

"But you *must* know, although I am sure you will be so upset. It's Ted and Fanny; they have had such a dreadful quarrel. Fanny has been to see father about it. I hardly know how to tell you, although I couldn't go to bed without telling you; you don't mind my waiting up? Fanny came up here to dinner. She couldn't stay alone in the hotel."

"In the hotel! What hotel? Isn't she at Grosvenor Street?" He had to pull himself together, listen to Mabel, help Mabel if she needed help. He must not grow selfish because he felt happy.

"Where is Ted? What *has* happened?"

Mabel's face was pale; even to repeat the abominable thing, shrinking from the thought that lay behind it, drove the colour from her cheeks.

"Some one said something to Ted about Mr. Merritt and Fanny, about his being there so much, living there. And Ted spoke to Fanny. Fanny said she was very angry, too angry to deny it. I don't know exactly what happened then; it all seemed to come about quite suddenly. She told me she wouldn't condescend to deny — to deny anything — and then Ted threatened to shoot her, to shoot Fanny!"

Her face was pale and her eyes wide.

Dennis was listening now, he had always feared what

might happen. Ted had many faults, but his loyalty was no fault. If the time came when it was shaken, Dennis had always feared what Ted might do; and just now he seemed to understand Ted better than before. Ted loved his wife in such a manner that if he came to doubt her, it would mean madness; it would drive him from his reason.

"Go on, what happened then?" he asked in a curious low voice, hushed, feeling suddenly cold.

"He did not shoot her, but . . . but . . . *he struck her.*" Mabel's eyes were dim; Dennis could see her hands were trembling.

"Don't try to tell me quickly. Wait, take your time over it." She gladly took the delay Dennis offered her; the last few hours had told cruelly upon her. Fanny had been hysterical for sympathy, lacking reticence, almost decency; the differences between herself and Mabel went too deep for her recognition. It was Fanny's trouble, but it hurt Mabel more. She was cold and trembling; Dennis had not left his overcoat in the hall, he took it off and wrapped it round her.

"I wish I'd thought of keeping the fire in; it is so careless of me." Her lips trembled. "I really don't mind the cold, do take it back."

She tried to disembarrass herself of it, but he made her keep it. If Ted had only struck Fanny, if he had given the thrashing she so well deserved, Dennis, for one, would think none the worse of him. But it was natural Mabel was shocked and wretched.

"And after he struck her?"

"Oh, Dennis," she burst into tears, "that wasn't the worst of it! He said dreadful things, things she could never forgive him. It was last night, and he followed her into her bedroom, you know she likes to sleep alone . . . She screamed out, for he had a revolver! He was going to shoot her, and then himself. I couldn't understand ex-

actly what happened then. She told me, but I couldn't quite understand. Mr. Merritt was in the house; she thought he had gone out, but it seems that he was still there . . . when he heard Fanny screaming he came in . . . Ted was shockingly violent, she said, almost like a madman. . . ."

Mabel was crying all the time she talked:

"Fanny said the gun was aimed full at her, she tried to get it from him and it went off. You can see the marks of it on the wall, Fanny says. It was just as Mr. Merritt came in. To-day she has been with father. She says she will never go back to Ted, she is frightened of him. If father doesn't help her, she will go to a lawyer. Father saw Ted this afternoon, and came on here afterwards. He was talking to Fanny for quite a long time, and he made me go out of the room. But Ted came up in a cab while they were together; and I could see he had been crying, his eyes were all swollen and he looked too dreadful! I couldn't help trying to comfort him. He takes all the blame upon himself, he said he was quite out of his mind, he hadn't meant any of the things he said. Father *made* Fanny see him afterwards. It was dreadful to hear Ted pleading with her; we could not help hearing it. Fanny told me he went down on his knees. . . ."

Dennis saw the scene, and hated it; Fanny's coldness, Ted's abasement.

"He begged her only to forgive him, he couldn't believe he had ever raised his hand to her; but she showed him the bruise. He said he never meant to hurt or shoot her, only himself."

"And what was the upshot of it all?"

"Father won't hear of Fanny leaving Ted. Ted says he'll do anything, anything, if she will only forgive him for having struck her. He turned white when he saw the bruise, and sick; as if he could hardly stand. Father

thinks Fanny was a little hard. She says she will only go back if Mr. Merritt stays there; she is afraid to be in the house alone with Ted."

"But Ted didn't agree?"

"He would have agreed to anything. Oh, Dennis!" she went up to him, he was standing by the mantelpiece, his heart was hot against Fanny, full of sympathy for Ted; he had forgotten all his own happiness of half an hour ago. Mabel had his coat around her, she was blue and shivering with cold. She had put her arms through the arms of the coat, turning back the sleeves, her hands, cold and tremulous, emerged, and he took them in his own; folding the coat more closely about her; he would have protected her from such a sorry scene as she related.

"You ought to be in bed," he said, "with a hot-water bottle. This is sheer folly. You'll make yourself ill. It isn't as if you were doing Ted or Fanny any good."

"But oh, Dennis, if it were us?" He laughed lightly.

"If I had struck you, do you mean?"

What she wanted to say she hardly knew herself, but it was a plea for tenderness she was instinctively making. Something she had missed lately from him; the knowledge of it may have been present with both of them. "We have never had one quarrel in all our five years together, have we?"

"Why should we quarrel?"

If she missed anything, his matter-of-fact words could hardly supply it. But he was not in the mood to be sentimental with her; the reaction in him was from sentiment.

"You don't see, nor your father either, that it isn't all Ted's fault. He may be rough, but he's honest; he can't meet the sort of thing with which Fanny surrounds him; the subtle cruelty of her indifference to him."

"She said once that she hated him, her own husband!" Mabel's voice was a horrified whisper. "Dennis, fancy

husband and wife hating each other. We, we . . ." She could not get out what she wanted to say.

"Why do you talk of us and of them in the same breath? You don't want even Roddy Ainsworth to live in the same house with you and me."

"Oh, Dennis!"

"You drop no venom from your tongue; your smiles are not malicious, your words, stabs. You had really better go up to bed now. You are quite chilled and miserable; I'll fill a hot-water bottle for you, if you will tell me where I can find one. A woman like Fanny is poison in the house, in the family; she distils it. Neither you nor your father understand her any better than Ted does. Ted can't fight it; it's eating away his strength and his manhood, his ambition, working power."

"But isn't anything better than they should separate? Whom God has joined. . . ." She lowered her voice, clinging to his arm.

It was obvious she did not want to leave him, to go alone to her own room. The evening's experiences had shaken her, and she needed her husband's kindness. He gave it to her in his matter-of-fact way, gave it to her without stint, persuading her to bed, finding and filling the hot-water bottle for her, kissing her pale cheek before he left her, doing his best.

When he had ministered to her, she thanked him for all his kindness, faltering out something about how different things were between them. She said she hoped that she had been a good wife to him, and that he never regretted having married her. He told her she need not worry about that.

After he had left her he found himself disturbed; not by what she had said, but by his own short response to it. She was the very soul of goodness. But to-night he wanted to be alone, to throw off Ted's troubles; to recall strange words of his own, and stranger thoughts. A man might be quite a good husband, and yet like to be alone. . . .

CHAPTER XVI

SOME sort of peace was patched up between Fanny and Ted. The details of it filtered slowly to Dennis; he gathered Mabel had acted as mediatrix, and that Amos had threatened to cut off supplies. In any case, when the great day dawned, Fanny was back in Grosvenor Street, and Cosmo Merritt not of the household.

The great day, of course, was the opening of the re-decorated Kemble Theatre under the lesseeship of Mr. Amos Juxton. Mr. Jewell was stage manager, Mr. Levine acting manager. The scenery was by Hewitt, the dresses by Carters. There was no mention at all of Cosmo Merritt, who, nevertheless, was responsible for everything that had been done. Amos Juxton had a way of sitting still and learning, when he was adding a new business or a new branch to his syndicated interests; and on this occasion it was Cosmo Merritt who knew more than he did. Amos had paid no heed to the cause of the quarrel between Fanny and her husband; and none of the people concerned had been anxious to impress it upon him. Ted's violent temper was now understood to have been the root of the trouble. Ted was humbly ready to admit it, and Mr. Merritt suffered nothing in Amos's eyes for having interfered in its exhibition. Cosmo Merritt was extraordinarily adroit in his treatment of Amos, and was already beginning to look upon the Kemble Theatre as the reward of his labours.

"Charles Auchester" was the opening production, but all the inspired newspaper paragraphs gave out that it was to be followed by the dramatised version of "The Tale and the Typewriter." There was an impression abroad that

"Charles Auchester" was only a stop-gap, that the lessee, or whoever was running the theatre, did not believe in it, was only staging it because the other piece was not yet ready. Naturally the "Great Australian Tenor," Mr. Roderick Ainsworth, who was bearing the leading part, and had parted with his interest in the play for the sum in cash that had been offered him, was unaware of this undercurrent. *He* had little doubt that his "Seraphino" would draw and astonish the town, and that the play itself would run for months, if not years.

Dennis heard continually of how Roddy sang this part or the other, of the difficult disputations at rehearsals, of the quarrels between the stage manager and Elsie, or Lottie, or "Maria." During all the week that followed the dinner party in Curzon Street, the gossip of the *coulisses* had alternated in Mabel's chastened volubility with Fanny's terms of surrender to her unhappy husband. The one topic seemed to Dennis, by now, to be even more tedious than the other. And with Roddy himself, his frequent presence at Hamilton Terrace, his blind, supreme egotism, the way he became impatient of any conversation that did not eddy round himself, he was conscious of being, in his own parlance, almost "fed up."

This night Amos did not drive them to the theatre, as had been at first suggested. He had been in to them the evening before, very important, full of his distinguished position. He told them he must be on the spot early; for the opening was to be honoured with the presence of Royalty. Not the real article, but a very colourable foreign imitation, necessitating satin programmes and bouquets, and a personal reception. It was Cosmo who had arranged all this, who had been prominent in allotting the seats, and was responsible for the press paragraphs. That he was usurping some one else's perquisites or position was obvious from the unpopularity to which Roddy constantly

referred. But Cosmo was not out for popularity. He was out to gratify his patron, the great Amos, and there was no doubt he was succeeding.

There are first nights and first nights. Cosmo carried out his intention that this one was to be "smart." All the critics were well placed, but the bulk of the seats had been allotted to Society with the appropriate capital. In the stalls, at least, although they had been given away and not sold, there were few theatrical hangers-on, professional deadheads, or old peroxide actresses.

On the way to the theatre Dennis heard from Mabel that Amos had retained the box opposite the Royal one for their party, among whom would be numbered Fanny and Ted. Amos himself, of course, would only be there occasionally, airing his arrogant humility in the background, after he had received the Royalties. Mabel told Dennis all about it on the way to the theatre.

"I shouldn't be a bit surprised if They wanted to know Roddy, too. Roddy says he is almost sure to be sent for. He doesn't mean to take off any of his 'make up'; he says they are used to it, he was once presented to the Gaekwar of Baroda! It is all so exciting, he was in splendid voice this afternoon. I only let him sing me one little song. He had been rehearsing with the orchestra all the morning; a dress rehearsal yesterday went on for nearly nine hours. He didn't let them see what he could do, not really. He wants to surprise them. I mixed a beaten egg with some port; that was all he has had since lunch time. We did not lunch until three. Oh, dear! I do hope Fanny and Ted are really friends again. Father has twenty people to supper at the Savoy afterwards. It was very kind of him to ask Roddy. He said it was because he was my friend. Father is thoughtful like that sometimes. Are we in Edgware Road already? Isn't this a slow cab? I do wish I had ordered a taxi. Can you see the time?"

"I shall begin to be jealous, like Ted. It has been Roddy, nothing but Roddy, ever since he came home."

Dennis was only chaffing; he had to say something and his mind was rather vacant. He had no idea Mabel would take him seriously, would be so immediately moved and discomforted. She was suddenly silenced, completely. They were in Oxford Street before she spoke again. It was so difficult to answer her husband as she wished, it was so awkward. She ought to have told him before, now it was so . . . so difficult. Dennis's wife had a conscience as sensitive as an exposed nerve. It was this nerve of a conscience his untoward words had touched.

"There is something I ought to have told you . . . I wanted to tell you quite a long time ago."

Dennis was annoyed at the effect of his words. He tried to laugh it off.

"Never mind now. I daresay it isn't very dreadful."

"Oh, no! But I must tell you."

"Well, wait until to-morrow, these windows are rattling so. I can't hear you."

"You are trying to be kind, not to listen." She spoke slowly, nervously, with something of the timidity of a girl. It was that nervous timidity of hers that had always moved his strength, it was his wife's claim upon him.

"I don't want to hear about anything. I was only joking."

"No; but, Dennis, you've always thought, I've let you think . . ." her face was averted from him, she was gazing out of the rattling window, and it was with difficulty he heard her, "that Roddy and I . . . that we were . . . that he had said something. It was all a mistake, he had never even thought of me that way. I knew it before he went away. But I let you think it was different. Perhaps it was because of that . . ." It was very difficult for her to say it, Dennis felt the agitation in her voice, although

her face was turned from him. "Perhaps it was because of that, of your thinking he had behaved badly, and being sorry for me, out of pity . . . that you asked me to marry you?"

"Absurd!" His tone was light. So that was what had been troubling her, her supersensitive conscience, an awkward possession for any woman, or man. His own was fairly clear, perhaps it was not so sensitive as hers. Everything between them seemed rather futile; neither his temper nor his spirits were as even as they used to be, before he hurt his leg at the end of the cricket season. He still put his alterations of mood, his recurrent restlessness, down to this cause, to this cause alone. The leg was well, but the moods remained. It was unfair that Mabel should suffer from them. He had been impatient with her more than once, both of them were conscious of a shadow between them, a vague sense of estrangement. She thought it was on Roddy Ainsworth's account.

"Absurd! I should have married you anyway," he repeated with a touch of impatience. "Don't get morbid. That's Fanny's influence, I suppose."

"Oh, no! It's nothing to do with Fanny. How could you think I would speak to Fanny about such a thing! But I have so often thought about it, and felt I ought to tell you. That is why at first I was so upset when you told me Roddy was in England. I had let you think ill of him; perhaps other people thought ill of him too. And he never meant anything. Why should he? I couldn't tell him, like I'm telling you, what had been thought, what I'd let you think. It was so wrong of me. I've tried to make it up to him. I wanted father to help him just for that. Not that father ever knew. I've gone over everything, all the songs, I mean, again and again. I'm so afraid . . . father has put so much money in it, and, in a way, you know I *am* responsible. I'm so nervous about it. For, Dennis,

you know, Roddy isn't . . . hasn't . . . his ear *is* a little defective. It always was, but I did so hope he had outgrown it. He sings flat sometimes; I was afraid they would notice it when he took Oliver Orchard's part. Perhaps I ought to have told father. But we've worked for hours and hours over those songs. I do think and hope he will be all right this evening. I've tried to make up to him for letting you, or anybody, think he had ever said anything to me that meant . . . I know I cried when he went away; but we had been such friends! And when you jeer at him, or are impatient with him, I think it is because of that false impression I gave you. . . ."

"Poor old girl!" He had hardly listened. That supersensitive conscience of hers bored him to-night, irritated him as it had not formerly. He had thought a long time ago, but dismissed it idly as not worth consideration, that Mabel had very likely misread Roddy's attention; "kidded to herself," as he expressed it. The better he had known his wife, the more impossible it had seemed that Roddy Ainsworth had been in love with her. Poor Mabel! So it had been on her conscience all these years.

"Don't worry about it. It won't break your father if the play isn't a success. You were quite right to coach Roddy, and do what you could for him. After all, you've known him all your life." Then he jested again. "I've only been afraid you were falling in love with him all over again. He's a picturesque chap." She edged a little nearer to him, but he held himself stiffly.

"You couldn't have thought that."

"Couldn't I? Well, perhaps not."

"Roddy has really fallen in love now with the lady who plays 'Maria.' He says she'll always draw a 'clinking' salary." The slang was strange on her lips. "It will be such a great thing if the play is successful. He doesn't want to get married, but he says it may come to that.

I wish I knew if she is a good musician. Then I should feel everything was all right for him. I should be able to have my 'at home' days again. I've neglected all my friends. You can't think how hard it has all been. And you've been so nice about it. Oh dear! Isn't this it? Aren't we there? Why are we stopping? What a string of carriages and cabs! We shall never get up to the door. Let's get out and walk. I've got quite stout shoes on . . ."

The box was unusually large, but quite usually uncomfortable. Fanny was already there, and had monopolised the best seat. The one next her must be kept free for Amos. Mabel said she was delighted with the other corner seat, the one next to the stage, if Dennis did not want it. Fanny said impudently, but she intended to be arch, that Dennis could sit behind her, or stand; and added that she knew he liked standing because it gave him an opportunity of exhibiting his inches.

Dennis was surprised, when Amos came in with Cosmo Merritt, to see how at ease Cosmo was with him and with Fanny. Obviously Amos did not attribute anything that had happened in Grosvenor Street to Cosmo Merritt. But Amos was a little sharp with Fanny, Dennis noticed; there was less purring between them. Cosmo began to name the people to Amos as they came in, drawing his attention also to the new colour scheme, talking of the drop curtain, asking them all if the decorations were not superior to anything that had ever been seen in London. He talked contemptuously of other theatres with their 'suburban drawing-room' white, pink, blue, or yellow. No one else had these superb Chinese scarlets, this vivid green and gold. Cosmo was a little excited to-night, more talkative than usual, less cool and *insouciant*. But it was only about the theatre; the atmosphere of it went to his head. Here his abilities would at last have full scope. Practically Amos's purse was in his hands, and he owed that to his

own diplomacy. He knew that he would need all his skill to keep that purse; he did not make the mistake of underrating Amos. His only mistake had been perhaps, at first, in overrating Fanny.

Mabel wanted to ask where Ted was. Certainly he was to have been of their party. She hoped that he was behind the scenes, or engaged in doing something for his father. There was so much to be seen to on a first night. But when they had settled down, and Amos had bustled out again to receive the Prince and his suite, she began to have her doubts. The band started "God Save the King," somewhat inappropriately, for the Royalty was a petty German princelet, with an "*Am Tag*" mental attitude; but there was still nothing to be seen of Ted. It was only when Amos had returned, more pompous than ever, looking a little stouter, that he, too, noticed the gap, and said, quite sharply, to Fanny, who usually had his dulcet tones:

"Where's Ted? I don't see Ted."

Fanny answered indifferently, with a shrug of her pale shoulders, and a toss of her fair head:

"He is playing at being ill. I believe he has eaten something that has disagreed with him. I left him word to join us at supper."

"Ill! I haven't heard anything about it. Has he had a doctor?"

"Not that I know of. I believe he has taken some medicine."

Fanny was not a well-bred person; but from that point of view she did not jar on Amos, and her explanation satisfied him. Besides, the overture was being played, and Cosmo frowned to them to "Hush!"

By looking over Mabel's head, Dennis could see Lord Loughborough and his daughter. They were alone tonight, Haverford was nowhere to be seen. It was a week since they had met, a whole long week. It seemed a year,

so much had happened. Nothing had happened, except to his feeling about her. That had seemed to alter, perhaps to go into deeper channels. He had not allowed himself to think too much about her, he had forced himself from thinking of her. One glimpse he allowed himself now, enough to know she was in green; that would have been Cosmo's doing. Cosmo had said he wished he could have dressed the entire house, sending out the shades that would have toned with the decorations. Mabel thought her husband wanted to see the Royalties.

"Take my place, Dennis, *do* take it," she whispered. "I can see quite well over your shoulder."

He hushed her impatiently, he did not want to see, he saw quite well. He said the one after the other, inconsistently.

There was a chair for him, and he sat down presently, in the dark at the back of the box, away from the stage. He had little interest in the play, and had been surfeited with the music. Even at that distance, he had been able to see that Lady Diana was looking behind and about her, as if she sought someone, awaited someone. Could it be himself? Green suited her wonderfully. He looked at the programme, there were three acts; he could go down between the acts, speak to her. Perhaps her father would go out for a cigarette.

There was only one person in the theatre for Dennis, there might be no play, and a dumb orchestra; he heard and saw nothing. Amos, on the other hand, might have written the play, and the music, and bought, not only the theatre, but the audience. He sat, right in front, in the middle of the box, his face beautifully aldermanic, one podgy hand on his podgy knee, turning his face now to one side, now to the other, anticipating admiration, directing the applause.

Everything seemed to be going quite well; the funny man evoked laughter, the solos were encored. Mr. Faza-

kerly had not begun to yawn, and the other critics seemed to be quite entertained. It was Cosmo who pointed all this out. Amos only nodded, as one who controlled it, and had known what they would all do.

In the outbreak of talk after the finale of the first act, when people were coming into their box, and introductions were being effected, Fanny playing the hostess prettily, and Amos patronising everybody, Dennis made his escape. As he hoped, yet hardly expected, Lady Diana was alone. She welcomed him with a smile; perhaps a slight blush. He slipped into the seat beside her; he hoped there would be a long wait, trusted no one else would come and speak to her.

"I did not see you at first; I looked for you in the stalls. Who are the people with you in the box? I saw Cosmo."

"My father-in-law, my wife."

"Oh!"

"And Mrs. Ted Juxton."

"The red haired woman this side?"

"Yes; that is Fanny, Mrs. Ted Juxton."

Then the other must be his wife. She looked drab, ineffective. Dennis to-night seemed more desirable, more attractive than ever. She smiled radiantly at him:

"Doesn't it seem a long time since we vowed friendship in the dusk?" she said, gaily. "Were not we foolish that evening, and young? I think we were very young."

He answered soberly: "I don't think I ever felt so old."

"You are such a thoughtful person."

"Too serious for you?"

"I didn't say that. One likes one's friends to be serious." If there was a trifle of banter in her words, or in her smiling eyes, he took no notice of it. The little flushes of warmth, of pleasure, that came to him as he sat by her side were due to the excitement of seeing her again, hearing her voice.

"I knew you were in the house. I felt it before I saw you."

He was easily the best looking man in the stalls; she compared him with the others as he sat beside her, liking the way he held himself, the ease of his movement. Perhaps she had had to put him from her thoughts, even as he had tried to banish her. At this moment they were only glad in each other's nearness. They talked a little about the play. She knew Cosmo had busied himself with the decorations of the house, a new system of lighting the stage.

"You think Cosmo clever, don't you? My mother always said that one day he would make a name in the world, carry everything before him. Of course she meant in politics, she never had an idea of any other Cosmo. I remember she said once that Mervyn and Vansittart were good enough for the army, but it was Cosmo who would direct how they should be used, and where."

"Of course he is very clever." He spoke hesitatingly, he had it in him to wish that Cosmo were not her brother. She must have seen his hesitation, and, of course, she knew men who did not appreciate Cossy; she turned the conversation:

"Why haven't you been to see me? I had an idea that you would have called."

A moment of candour made him blurt out:

"I haven't dared."

"But I thought we were going to be friends?"

She turned towards him, and their eyes met; until now she had been looking down, about her, anywhere but at him. Now there was raillery in them and he thought if she could rally him like that he would not be behind her in courage.

"May I come to-morrow?" Before she had time to answer, but he knew she had not said "No," Lord Lough-

borough was working his way back to his seat, complaining of the closeness of the stalls.

"I am told Cossy is responsible for the theatre. Have you heard anything about it?" he asked Dennis.

"Well, not exactly responsible." But it was difficult to say where Amos's and Roddy's responsibility ended, and Cosmo's began.

"He was very anxious we should be here to-night," Diana said. "He sent seats to Aunt Mary, and to Irene . . ."

Dennis, now they were indicated, became conscious of Lady Irene's cordial bow.

"You ought to go and speak to her," Diana breathed in his ear.

"Must I?"

She smiled at him, and he saw that she was not displeased he wished to remain. But nevertheless she bade him go, too much of a woman not to enjoy seeing Irene making a fool of herself. Irene had asked so many questions about him, angling for another invitation to meet him. She had not told Irene that he was married, and sending him to her now, she saw Irene detaining him with quick talk and laughter, making him sit down in the empty seat beside her. Aunt Mary, too, was very civil, if somnolent.

Diana, looking at the programme, talking to her father, pictured them together, was conscious of Irene's little airs and graces, could divine Aunt Mary's placid platitudes. Aunt Mary knew nothing of him except that she had seen him in Curzon Street. That was sufficient hall mark; but Dennis was hall marked all over. Notwithstanding his height, he moved with grace and ease. Now Diana was wondering what he was finding to say to Irene. Quite soon, however, she saw him back in the box.

In the interval after the second act he sat with her again; and every pulse of her was conscious of his vicinity. She had begun to realise the way he affected her. Sometimes

what he said escaped her, she only heard the voice in which he said it.

"Until to-morrow, then," she said, holding out her hand. He held it a moment longer than was necessary, or usual. She felt his through her glove, firm, a little hard, a man's hand.

"Until to-morrow," he answered. The intervening hours would be as nothing; the grasp on her hand lingered.

"Are you staying until the end? I may see you in the hall."

"I don't know. I should hardly think so. Not if it is going to be a failure. I hate to hear hissing on a first night."

The second act had not gone as well as the first. But the pit and gallery had been properly provided with the English equivalent of a claque, and there was sufficient applause to reassure the artists. The third act was the best of all; now the clapping and encores were spontaneous. Lord Loughborough and his daughter had no occasion to hurry from the theatre. All the actors and actresses were called, and called again, the curtain rising twice on the grouped scene, and then again for 'Maria' and 'Seraphino.' The bouquets which Cosmo had been careful to provide were handed up one after another by the conductor of the orchestra, quite solemnly, as if he did not know it was part of the play, preconcerted, arranged. Then there was the call for the author, and after a pause the announcement that he was not in the house, but that their kind approval would be conveyed to him. There were even calls for the scene-painter and the producer. Amos, at one time, thought he might go on, and make a little speech. But Cosmo dissuaded him, he said it would be an anti-climax.

"Don't let them see you until after the curtain goes down on 'The Tale and the Typewriter.'"

Amos saw the sense of that.

In the vestibule, too, success seemed to be the note. There were quite a chorus of congratulations and pretty speeches from the people to whom Cosmo had given seats, and from Amos's friends. Cosmo may have had his doubts. He knew the difference between first night applause and cold criticism in the morning; but he had no intention of dashing Amos's self-glorification.

"What did I tell you, my boy? What did I tell you? Amos Juxton makes no mistakes. I know what the public want. I've always known it, my boy, I've felt their pulses! I've known every call of their stomachs, and I know where their hearts are, too. That girl singing to her lover, ill as she was, and he responding, I knew they would gulp over that. There was hardly a dry eye in the stalls. I knew that was how it would be. They want to laugh, and to cry, and I've given them both. China tea in the stalls, and Juxton's whisky in the bars. What more can they want?" He was really delighted with all he had done.

Amos was in no hurry for his motor; he waved the footman away when he forced his way through the throng. "No hurry! No hurry!"

He was benignant, he was even benevolent in his desire that other people might have their carriages before him. He played the host, waving away compliment, pooh-poohing congratulations, with an almost aggressive modesty. It had not been likely that he would fail in any enterprise. Nothing that he had undertaken, however, had come to fruit as quickly as this. Every clap had been a tribute to him; it was easy to see he had taken it all to himself. Now he patronised his supporters, patted them on the shoulders, metaphorically. Like the clerks and underlings at Juxton's Ltd., to whom he gave presents and praise at the annual general meetings, they had all done their share, he was quite ready to admit it. And yet presently both Dennis and Cosmo sensed an uneasiness under his complacency, an

irritation. It found voice when at length the audience had nearly all dispersed, and he was looking round to see how many of his supper party could be crammed into the motor.

"That boy never came," he said to Dennis. "I suppose he wasn't in the crowd; nobody has seen him?"

There was no answer.

"I hope there hasn't been any more unpleasantness?"

He looked at Fanny.

Fanny smiled, shaking her head, shrugging her shoulders.

"I told him to join us at supper. He wouldn't take any interest in a play. Ted only cares for music halls." The success had gone to Fanny's head, too, a little. Now she wanted to be on the old terms with her father-in-law.

"Well, don't let us have ructions or recriminations at supper, that's all. I want a harmonious evening."

"Of course not; nothing must spoil your triumph."

She smiled quite prettily at him. But he had not that buttered expression Fanny's pretty smiles and speeches used to bring over him. He, too, like Mabel, had not been clear as to what had really happened. Ted's self-reproaches had touched father and sister in some different way from the effect they had had upon Fanny.

"Perhaps you'd better not come on with us?" Amos said, a little uncertainly to Cosmo.

Cosmo knew the ins and outs of the thing, there would be newspaper men to entertain. But in this hour of his triumph he wanted his son, and if it were Cosmo standing in the way, Cosmo must be sacrificed.

As Dennis handed Mabel into the motor, Fanny hung back a moment to speak to Cosmo.

"There is no reason you should not be there; Ted isn't coming."

"What's the matter with him?"

"I haven't spoken to him since I went back," she laughed.

"I told you I wouldn't. He's taken to his bed. I sent him word he was to come on to the supper whether he was ill or well. But he would have been here if he had been able to come. You'll see he won't be at the Savoy. Waters heard him moaning and groaning all last night."

"You are a callous little devil!"

Cosmo's face was inscrutable, but Fanny felt it was praise that had been accorded her.

"I'll walk round, sir," he said to Amos. "If Ted is there, I will be guided by his attitude whether to join you or not. Anyway, I'll see Frobisher and Kent."

They were the two critics who had accepted Amos's invitation to supper; weekly paper men, who had not, like the others, to rush from the stalls to their offices, hastily to give forth the results of their ill-digested meal.

Fanny purred over Amos in the car. How smoothly everything had gone, what a wonderful success it had been! She was sure it would run for years. Her purring had no effect at all upon Amos, he had begun to distrust Fanny. She must know why Ted had not appeared, it must be in some way her fault. He snubbed Fanny, who, however, was thick-skinned and impervious; he addressed himself particularly to Dennis and Mabel, who fell in better with his mood. Both of them were a little uneasy, however; it was not like Ted to absent himself on such an occasion; they wondered what had happened.

There was no sign of him at the Savoy, neither in the hall, nor at the large round table, profusely decorated with roses and garnished with two magnums of champagne, to which, when sufficient of the party had been collected, they went in procession. There was nothing benignant in Amos's expression now. He had a grievance, and a grievance with Amos was a very serious thing, it hurt his importance, his self-confidence.

"He *ought* to be here," he said again to Dennis.

"Perhaps he really isn't well."

"*She* wouldn't be here if he were ill; she'd have that amount of decency, surely."

"How would it be if I telephoned over, or even went on? I could be there and back in fifteen minutes if I had the car."

"Would you? There's a good fellow. I must have my mind at rest. They'll expect a speech from me."

"You won't have time to miss me. Look after Mabel. I daresay there is nothing really wrong."

Amos said it was very good of him to go. But in truth Dennis was glad to get away. The huge supper party, Amos's self-glorification, Cosmo's immobile eyeglass, and manner of stage-managing the entertainment, were incongruous with his own mood. His own mood was a strange one, inexplicable even to himself. Since he had sat in the stall by the side of Lady Diana, since he knew he would see her again to-morrow, his pulses were uneven, and he was conscious of an untoward, an unusual, an almost unknown excitability. He did not want to sit through a long supper, with Roddy, and Cosmo, and the rest of them; he was out of tune with it.

In Grosvenor Street, before the door was opened, he was arrested by the consciousness that something was wrong, seriously wrong. To begin with, there was a brougham at the door, Dr. Lauder's brougham, surely; the door was opened before he had time to ring; it was Dr. Lauder himself who opened it.

"Oh, it's you! I expected Porter. I've sent for Porter, and an anæsthetist; there isn't a moment to lose. Where's his father?"

Dr. Lauder was the family practitioner, he had attended Mabel and Ted through all their childish ailments, and Mabel in her adult neuralgia. He looked upon Dennis as quite one of the family.

"He ought to be here, you know. And that she-fiend, his wife, where is she?" Dr. Lauder did not mince his words. "The poor fellow must have been ill for days. His temperature is 104. Why wasn't I sent for before?"

"When *were* you sent for?" Dennis asked, almost mechanically. He was very shocked, and startled. Whatever he had expected, or whatever that vague sense of uneasiness had portended, he had not expected this. Dr. Lauder said, and his face said it more clearly, that Ted was in danger. Dennis had known Ted all his life.

"I was only sent for an hour ago; it seems in the absence of my lady's maid, who had been attending him — attending him, my God! — the housemaid went in, and took alarm. Poor fellow! He must have suffered terribly. No one has been near him since yesterday, except the maid. I suppose she reported to her mistress. She gave him brandy, and more brandy. She might just as well have given him poison. I doubt if we shall pull him through."

Dennis could have sworn the old man had tears in his eyes; he took his glasses off, and wiped them.

"There's Porter, I hear wheels." He was on the doorstep again. He almost pulled the precise surgeon out of the cab.

"Thank Heaven, you've come! Let us go straight upstairs. Get his father, Passiful, there's no time to lose. You've got Bates?"

The surgeon, a gaunt man with a melancholy air, was followed out of the cab by a little, rosy, well-fed man in glasses, carrying a bag. Dr. Lauder preceded them upstairs; talking in a low, quick voice.

In the hall the servants stood open-mouthed and expectant; they liked the excitement, the prospect of more that might be coming, the possibility of a death in the house.

Dennis could not leave the house, even to go back to Amos

as he had promised, as he had been directed to do. He felt he must first know what the surgeon had to say, and what was going to be done to Ted. He went into the library to scribble a note to Amos. He could send it by the chauffeur. His hand was quite shaky; now he had forgotten everything but Ted.

"Ted very ill, come on here as soon as you can get away." He said nothing about an operation, he knew it would be a dreadful word to Amos, as it was to him. He liked it no better when one of the hastily procured nurses ran down and asked him to come upstairs. The doctors had had their short, hurried conference. It was true that there was not a moment to be lost; the temperature had gone up a point since it was last taken. There were other serious symptoms. It turned Dennis white and sick to hear of them; and seeing this they spared him details.

Dr. Lauder met him at the top of the stairs, at Fanny's bedroom door.

"He is quite conscious, the pain is not as bad as it was. We've got his permission to do what's necessary, but he wants his father and his wife sent for, he doesn't think he'll get through. We told him you were here. Say a cheerful word to him; then clear out. We're going to improvise an operating table. Mr. Bates is ready to start the chloroform before we carry him in. Don't be out of the way, we may want more help."

Dennis heard Ted moaning, it went to his heart. To reach him, he had to go through Fanny's room, with which the Doctors were making free, past the bath-room, and into the little dressing-closet — it was hardly more — where Ted lay, and moaned. He was lying on his back, his face very drawn and altered. Dr. Lauder had said that he was conscious, but his eyes were closed, and at first it did not seem that he heard Dennis come in. Dennis, on the nurse's whispered suggestion, spoke to him.

"I'm sorry to see you like this, old man."

Then Ted opened his eyes, they had a strained, unnatural look, glassy, as if they saw further, and differently, than they had ever seen before.

"I'm better, I'm all right; don't worry about me. Is Fanny here? Don't frighten her. I called out — I think I called out last night, and yesterday She said she wouldn't speak to me until Cossy came back. It's you, Dennis, isn't it? Is he in the house? Keep him out of the house, there's a good fellow. It won't be long now. He's better suited to her than I am. I haven't been much good to anybody. It's been Fanny first and the rest nowhere for years. The governor'll be sorry, he was awfully good to me lately. Tell him . . ."

But Dennis never heard what he was to tell Amos. Ted's speech tailed off into silence, and all at once it seemed the doctors were surrounding him.

"*Collapse.*"

Dr. Lauder's fingers were on his pulse, and the word in the air.

"Get him under as quickly as you can," was the surgeon's low, decisive order to the anæsthetist. "It's the only chance."

"You go downstairs; and keep the house quiet," Dr. Lauder found time to say to Dennis; the strongest man may well blench when he sees his boyhood's friend under the knife. Dennis was very pale, and Dr. Lauder was taking no unnecessary risk. He might faint.

"Get away, you're no use here for the moment; see that there isn't a sound in the house."

Dennis was glad to obey him. All at once the room had begun to stifle him, Ted and his face were not clear. But once outside, with the staircase window open to revive him, he recovered himself quickly. He would not stay downstairs, he might be of use on the floor where they all were.

He was not going to faint, but it had all come about so quickly. . . .

There followed what seemed an interminable time of waiting. He heard the nurses going in and out with basins. It was even a relief when one came running to him for more hot water. Anything was better than this inactivity. He ran downstairs to the kitchen for a kettle, returning with a huge one, filled and steaming. He volunteered to get another.

He thought he heard Ted moaning again, and found it unbearable to listen . . . the atmosphere became laden with ether and disinfectants. He got out of the room again as soon as he had emptied out the kettle for them. The open window on the staircase was a godsend. Now he heard the motor draw up, the front door slam.

He dashed down stairs, he did not want Amos to have such a shock as he had had.

All their faces were white as they stood in the hall listening to the excited servants. Amos seemed to have forgotten his importance, his fat cheeks had gone flaccid. It was Mabel who saw Dennis first. Mabel's eyes were wet, but she was clinging to her father, as if she would stave off the bad news from him.

"Here is Dennis, father, here is Dennis. He will tell us. Dennis, it isn't true . . ."

"Come in to the library. We have got to keep the house quiet." He, too, went to Amos, put a strong arm in his. With the need his strength came back to him.

"They are doing all they can. I heard one of the nurses say it was going on all right. We've got nothing to do but wait, and keep the house quiet; it may be another half hour. Shall I get you a whisky and soda? You must keep up, sir." He was overwhelmed with compassion for Amos, who looked so unlike himself, so unlike what he had looked an hour ago. Dennis never gave a thought or a glance to Fanny, Ted's

wife. All his concern was for Amos, whose silence and pallor alarmed him.

"Dr. Lauder will come down as soon as he can. I'll get back now, the nurses may want help."

"Don't go, my boy. Don't go for a moment. Tell me . . ." Amos had quite lost his self-possession, he looked like a pricked bladder. Mabel took the glass from Dennis's hand, she almost had to hold it to her father's lips.

"I will go upstairs," Mabel said hurriedly. "You stay with father. I can do everything that may be wanted. I know where everything is, I am used to a sick-room. Stay with father."

Dennis knew she would be more useful than he; he was relieved when she went upstairs He mixed another drink for himself, and began to talk platitudes. Amos in the easy-chair, trying to regain his composure and his dignity, listened as if it were Solon and Solomon speaking.

"Ted's strength will help him; his constitution will pull him through. It's not as if he had even had a day's illness before, serious illness, at least. Every one has appendicitis now-a-days, and gets through it all right. I saw the numbers the other day, in the 'Daily Mail,' of people whose appendix had to be removed, it's something enormous. In America there is a club for people who have no appendix. Ted said . . ."

But he gulped at his glass when he tried to tell Ted's father what he had said. Ted would tell him himself to-morrow, or the next day. Hope came to him with his platitudes, with the sound of his own voice. "Porter is the best surgeon in London. Dr. Lauder won't neglect any precaution. . . ."

No one had taken any notice of Fanny. She had not attempted to go upstairs, but sat near the door in the dining-room, on a high-backed chair, huddled up in her fine new opera-cloak; her face was very pale. She was listening, listening, listening. Now they were all silent again. The

minutes seemed hours. They started at a sound, a creaking board, a running footstep. Nothing happened. The cabs passing in the street maddened them. Once, hearing the whispering servants outside, Dennis went out, at Amos's instigation, and roughly dismissed them to their quarters. Then there was more waiting, a deeper silence. On Amos's forehead, where the thin hair was parted, the sweat broke out. Once he said, weakly:

"I can't bear this . . . this suspense."

"I'll run up and see if I can't get hold of Mabel, hear any news."

"No, no, sit down, sit down, my boy. Don't leave us."

Nobody now could doubt Amos's feeling for his only son; it was painful to watch him. Dennis turned his eyes away, tried to think of more platitudes, but now there seemed nothing else to say.

"He didn't ask for me?"

"He said I was to give his love to you . . . you'd been very good to him lately . . . he hadn't been much of a son to you. . . ." Amos brushed his hands against his eyes.

"When was that?"

"Before he went under the chloroform."

Dennis did not know what more to say for comfort. Now they heard nothing but the ticking of the clock. It was one o'clock — a quarter past — half past.

"They can't be much longer now."

At last they heard someone running down the stairs. It was Dr. Lauder. Amos was his direct objective; he seemed to guess how it would be with him.

"All over," he said, briskly, "well over; he bore it better than we could possibly have expected. Strength well maintained. He'll do now, he'll do."

Amos tried to speak.

"Take it quietly. It has been too great a shock for you." No one knew the great Amos better than Dr. Lauder; his

strength and his weakness. He would not let him stand up.

"Sit where you are, take things easy."

"I, I . . . it has been a most anxious evening altogether." Amos made an effort after his pomposity, but it was a poor attempt.

"Of course, of course," said Dr. Lauder. "I understand. Has anyone given you a drink? That's right. He will very likely be asking for you presently, he spoke of you the last thing before he went off. Did Dennis tell you? It was touch and go. Poor fellow! Poor boy! And brave as a lion; no flinching or fear. 'Get it over quickly; don't frighten the governor, or bring him away from the theatre.' That is what he said when I told him there would have to be an operation."

Lauder took off his glasses and wiped them. His nerves had been at high tension a long time, he was within an ace of exhibiting emotion, a thing one does not expect from a family practitioner. Perhaps it was as well Fanny created a diversion. She had been ignored long enough; probably she had her own thoughts to occupy her. For two days she had known that Ted was ill, shut her ears to it, ignored it, laughed, and showed all her pretty teeth when she told Cosmo she had heard him groaning, but had not gone in, or spoken to him. She had kept her vow that she would not speak to him until Cossy came back to Grosvenor Street. God alone knows what she thought, or hoped, in that tense hour when the doctors were busy with him. He had given her love and devotion for years; she owed him all she had. Fine clothes, this West-End house, all the possibilities of her life. He was upstairs, lying between life and death, she had left him untended in his agony. God alone knows what she thought, what was behind her silence, and yellow pallor. But when Dr. Lauder took off his glasses, when he said that Ted would do all right now, she startled him and

Amos, and Dennis, who was standing by the door, still listening. Dennis seemed to have spent all his life listening; the surgeon had still to come down, and the anæsthetist; all could hardly be as well, as safe, as Dr. Lauder was telling Amos. Mabel was still upstairs, too. Fanny startled them all by bursting into hysterical crying, and then, louder and more hysterical laughter, falling from her chair to the floor; lying there, sobbing hysterically.

It was this commotion that roused the doctor.

"Stop that, I tell you! Stop that!"

All his fears were for the patient upstairs, who might hear the hysteria. Fanny sobbed more loudly than ever, and said how unkind he was, she had been so terrified . . .

Amos was trying to recover his pomposity, he said he could understand Fanny's grief.

"It was a shock to me too, Lauder," he admitted that. "We have never had an operation in my family. *I* have never been operated upon." And he began to talk about his own exceptional stamina, breaking off, however, to ask for further reassurance. "You are sure he will be all right? There will be no occasion for him to come to business until he is quite himself again. Of course there must be no thought of exertion. Tell him his mind can be quite at ease about everything; tell him I said so."

Now Fanny was reviving, but still lying on the floor, and saying she was afraid she was going to faint, she was sure Ted had never been so bad as they said. Then all at once she scrambled to her feet.

"I'm going up to him. I ought to be with him, I know he wants me. . . ." She was at the door before Lauder had her by the shoulder.

"No, you don't, my lady. You have had the chance for two days of going to him, and you didn't take it. I'll see there's no murder done whilst I'm in the house to prevent it; he is in no condition for scenes."

Fanny didn't like the word murder, she did not like the doctor's grip on her shoulder. The whites of her eyes showed. She may have feigned hysteria at first, but now it was the real thing; and Dr. Lauder pulled her savagely into the room. He got her inside, and the door shut, and without hesitation he took the carafe of water from the sideboard and dashed it in her face.

"I'll tie the tablecloth round her head if she isn't quiet," he said savagely to Dennis. "She is only acting. Get me another jug of water. Rather than he should hear her I'd give her a morphia injection."

He actually did stifle her shrieks with the tablecloth, almost flinging her on to the sofa.

"Put your hand in my pocket, get me out the case." He made his preparations quickly. "Be quiet, you know you can if you choose," he said roughly. He had no sympathy with Fanny. She did grow quiet when she realised he was in earnest about the morphia injection, and had even pinched a bit of her bare arm between his fingers prior to inserting the needle. She tore herself away from him and said he was very cruel, every one was very cruel to her.

Fanny relapsed presently into feebleness and fainting, possibly genuine, satisfactory anyhow. Dr. Lauder put away his case, but he spoke to her very plainly, although quietly. Neither Dennis nor Amos heard what he said; they were still listening for sounds from upstairs. Fanny's attempt to make a scene had only distracted, not held them. Nobody but Fanny heard what Dr. Lauder said. He did not mince his words, they were only a few short, sharp sentences. The effect of them was to turn her sobs into a whimper; he had succeeded in frightening her. She would not go up to his patient now, he had secured the boy his fighting chance.

After a few moments she said sullenly that nothing he had said was true, and when Ted got well he'd never forgive him

for having said it. It was later on, when Dr. Lauder had gone upstairs, that she became audible again and wanted Mabel to come down to her. She said that Mabel would understand how she felt: everybody was against her! Amos said he wasn't against her. Dennis walked out of the room when Fanny began to say how grateful she was to her father-in-law.

Everybody wanted Mabel apparently. The nurses had found her more useful than Dennis. Amos said he would like to hear what Mabel thought of Ted, if she could come down for a few minutes. Dr. Lauder sent her down when he went back to the sick-room. He instructed Mabel she was to reassure her father, whatever she herself might think.

"Your father has had a great shock, I didn't like his colour at all when I went downstairs. These stout men . . ."

But there was no need to give Mabel a dissertation on the liability of men of plethoric habit to apoplexy under excitement. Dr. Lauder had a very wise appreciation of Mabel's quality; a hint was sufficient. "Get him to go home. We want to have the house quiet for the night. I shall stay another hour or so."

Mabel told her father that Ted was still under the anæsthetic, he seemed very comfortable, quite quiet. She said, truthfully, that she did not think he was suffering, or had suffered under the operation. The nurses, surgeon, everybody, had said what a good patient Ted was; they were all very hopeful.

"Don't stay, father. Dennis will go home with you, won't you, Dennis? I am going to sit up with the night nurse. Dr. Porter is just going, and that means he is satisfied. He told me himself that the operation had been quite successful."

Mabel was so consistent in her talk, so like herself, that insensibly she soothed her father. It was as if he began to fill out again, reassuring them with stories of operations of which he had heard; following Dennis's lead.

By the time the surgeon and his assistant came into the library, Amos had almost regained his characteristics of voice and manner. He patronised the surgeon, and surprised him. The surgeon had done his butcher's work deftly, and was proud of it. The patient was hardly his affair, but he was surprised that his father, if this was his father, was so pleased with what he had done. The operation had been wholly successful, but it seemed unlikely the young fellow would recover from it. Amos was quite congratulatory, admitted he had had a fright, talked as if the whole affair were over. He spoke of a cheque. Dr. Porter waved the idea aside; that would do to-morrow, Dr. Lauder would know the amount. It was understood that he, Mr. Juxton senior, charged himself with all the expenses of the illness. All that Amos could do to show his gratitude and relief was to talk of cheques. But it helped more than anything else to restore his own complacency.

Fanny was now huddled upon the sofa, and called out to Mabel in a weak voice. Mabel, ignorant of the attack of hysteria and of everything that had happened, put comforting arms about her.

"Poor Fanny! Poor dear! It has been dreadful for you, dreadful." They cried together, Fanny's tears had a muddied source, Mabel's came from pure pity.

But fear was knocking at her heart, all the time fear was knocking at her heart, and her arms round Fanny were the expression of it. "He is going to get better, I know he is. And then things will be so different between you. Poor Fanny!"

She did not know that Ted would get better, fear was knocking at her heart, streaming from her eyes; she hid them on Fanny's shoulder.

"I'll stay with you, dear. He doesn't want me just now; the nurses can do everything. I'll stay with you. Don't cry any more, he is going to get better. We will nurse him

between us, you and I. I know that is what he will like when he comes to himself. Everything will come right between you then; he will be so dependent upon you, and gentle. You will care for him so. Poor Fanny!"

But it was poor Mabel who needed comfort, and found it in tending Fanny, and all of them.

Before Dennis and Amos left, it had been agreed that Mabel should remain as long as she was needed. Fanny clung to her, she felt that Fanny clung to her. She had shed those few tears on Fanny's neck, but there were no tears when she kissed her father good-night; she knew he wanted reassurance to help him through the night. She said again that she knew it would be all right, and that they would have good news in the morning. She took her father's many instructions meekly. They all came to this, that no expense was to be spared. Dennis demurred a little at leaving her. He, too, would have stayed if any use could have been found for him. But Mabel wanted him to go home with her father, and urged it.

"Do take father home, Dennis. He looked so shaken, quite ill. I'll telephone the first thing in the morning, the very first thing. Perhaps you'll come in on your way to Bond Street? You look so tired, too. I'm sure you ought to get to bed."

"But you, how about you?"

Mabel never thought about herself. She only knew that she was needed here, and when that was in her mind it was useless to ask her to spare herself.

CHAPTER XVII

TELEPHONING before breakfast next morning, Mabel was able to report that Ted had spent a quiet night. The message was to be taken up to her father with his morning tea. But at Hamilton Terrace, Dennis, already awake and anxious, answered the instrument himself and asked for fuller details.

"Dr. Lauder never went away until four. He is coming back very early, he seemed so disappointed Ted's temperature had not gone down more," Mabel could never resist the obvious, "but the first days after an operation are always anxious, I've just been in to Fanny, she says she never closed her eyes all night . . ." Dennis wished to be spared a description of Fanny's feelings. He interrupted to tell her that he was not dressed yet; he would come in to see her on his way to Bond Street.

Hurrying over his breakfast, his pipe and his paper, Dennis remembered "Charles Auchester" and turned to the column that chronicled theatrical affairs. He did not find his way easily about any paper but the "Sportsman"; but he got to it at last.

"Charles Auchester" might have suited transatlantic audiences, but the more fastidious taste of the British Islander would find it mawkish and unsatisfying.

The other paper, Mabel's favourite organ, snappy and deplorably illustrated, in its paragraphic columns talked of "the great heart of the people," and how it had responded to the sorrows of Seraphino. From such a divergence of opinion Dennis could extract no certainty as to whether success or failure awaited the new venture.

But now that he was recalling last night, and the events that occurred before Ted's extremity had blotted out everything else, he remembered his appointment for the afternoon, remembered, and was glad, more than glad. The thought of it illumined the dulness of the day, and sent him forth with elastic step to greet the morning. The sun was breaking through the fog, and the touch of frost, the breath of the winter that was coming, was as a tonic.

In Grosvenor Street he thought the house had a dissipated air. The butler answered the door in his shirt sleeves. Fanny had not the gift of engaging servants, or retaining them; this was a foreign importation with undignified ways. He said that Mrs. Juxton was not up, and that the doctors had not been yet. He would "try" to get a message sent up to Mrs. Passiful, but seemed doubtful of his ability. Half the blinds were still drawn, and the windows unopened; a stench of disinfectants lingered about the closeness. Dennis waited in the dining-room, which was littered with remains of last night's *débâcle;* the tablecloth still on the floor, the empty carafe and used glasses proclaiming that it had not been approached by housemaid's broom. The house was understaffed, and the housemaid, waiting continually on Fanny, had never time to clean her house or attend to her duties. Dennis wondered how Mabel had fared in the disorder. He was not surprised at the forlornness of her air when she came to him.

"Have you had any breakfast, a bath? Has anybody looked after you? You've been sitting up all night, haven't you?"

But Mabel had no eyes for the disorder of the room, nor thought for her own requirements.

"Oh, Dennis! I don't think he is as well as he ought to be. The day nurse has come on, and the two were whispering together with such grave faces. His temperature is over 102°. I am so longing for Dr. Lauder to come."

"Does he know you?"

"He hasn't said anything. Sometimes I think he does."

She wanted to tell him too about Fanny and her sleepless night, to elicit his sympathies for her. But Dennis had no sympathy for Fanny. He said quite cruelly that she had better get up and set her house in order. But that it was not Mabel's way to criticise her husband, she would have thought he was unkind. As it was she looked at him doubtfully, and about the room perhaps more comprehendingly; and then repeated vaguely that the few days after an operation were always anxious, and Dennis mustn't worry; "Father," too, must be kept with mind at ease. "I am sure we are all thinking of nothing but Ted."

Dennis could hardly have agreed with that dictum! When he got to Bond Street, there was a messenger boy waiting to see him, with a little note, to which it was not clear whether a reply was necessary.

"Come early, not later than four. Will explain when I see you."

There was no beginning, no signature; the handwriting clear and upright like a man's. At first he said there was no answer, then hesitatingly he told the boy to go back and say: "All right." But this seemed a little inadequate, and finally he went into the office to write a note. Mr. Dolland was there, and began speaking at once about business, about some tapestries of which he had heard. Dennis said he would talk to him presently, he had a letter to write. Taking the hint, Mr. Dolland left him alone to write it. But once alone he found it difficult to know exactly what to say. He put the note a moment against his cheeks, coloured angrily, and felt that he was a fool.

"Dear Lady Diana."

He hated that somehow, and tore it up. In a foolish schoolboy moment he thought of scribbling only, "Rather," or "What do *you* think?" He began again: "I am

counting the hours. . . ." He tore that up too, he did not count hours, nobody ever counted hours, it was like one of Mabel's phrases.

"Dear Lady Diana,

"At four to the minute. Thanks for letting me come.

Yours . . ."

He stuck a little at the 'Yours.' Was it to be 'Yours ever,' 'Yours devotedly?' 'Yours.' He left it at that finally, blotting and addressing it hurriedly. What did it matter what he wrote? At four he would see her.

Dennis did a respectable morning's work, heard all Dolland had to say about the tapestries, and agreed to go over to Provence to look at them. But only if his brother-in-law was all right. He explained that he must wait a day or two to see. Mr. Dolland heard about the hurried operation last night, and was properly sympathetic, but afraid if they waited too long the tapestries might have gone. Mr. Murray Straus was on the scent of them, hot on the scent.

At lunch time Amos came in. He struck Dennis as looking flabby, older, as if he had passed through an illness. But his manner was as self-satisfied as ever.

"No end of telegrams and messages, letters, I don't know what."

It took Dennis a moment to realise it was not of Ted's illness, but of the play, that he was speaking.

"Merritt has been with me the best part of the morning. We shall have to make some cuts." The pomposity of the 'we' was characteristic. "And there were faults in the lighting. The box office people have made us offers . . ." Dennis asked if he had heard how Ted was going on.

"Merritt called up Grosvenor Street before he came on to me. He says Fanny told him Ted was going on splendidly." Amos was obviously ashamed of the amount of emotion he

had displayed last night, this morning it seemed as if it had been so unnecessary.

"It is nothing of an operation now-a-days, they say. I should have gone round myself only he is to be kept absolutely quiet. I wrote Mabel a line to give him when he is able to read it. I told him he wasn't to worry about anything, I'd see him through the expense and send him a sea voyage afterwards. That will set him up. . . ."

"He said you had always been so generous to him. . . ." Amos waved that aside, perhaps a little grandiloquently.

"Perhaps I have, perhaps I haven't. I'm not altogether sure he's got the right wife." This was a change of front. Dennis had been expecting this. "She's attractive, pretty; but the boy is sensitive. She doesn't understand him. . . . " Amos had not understood him very well, either, Dennis thought, but he said nothing. "He is hot tempered, and, of course, he's not clever. As Merritt says, the sons of great men are often decadent," he brought this out quite naïvely. "Ted hasn't got too much brain. But we're better friends than we used to be; he has been sticking to business better lately. I know he's doing his best. She was upset last night. Lauder was rather rough with her, wasn't he? Merritt tells me there is no truth at all about Fanny having neglected Ted. She has been very worried about him, but couldn't get him to see a doctor, or to take care of himself. He has always been an obstinate fellow."

Dennis asked his father-in-law to lunch with him, but Amos said he was much too busy, "over head and ears." He had to be at the theatre in the afternoon, he "almost wished now he had never taken it on at all." But Dennis saw that this hardly represented his feelings. He was enjoying his importance, and the direct and indirect advertisement, the interviews. He had quite decided Ted was all right, and that he need not be anxious about him

any more." Although he was quite decided upon this point, the operation of last night had left its traces; it was as if a sirocco had blown over him, hot and devastating, he had lost something of freshness, vigour, his colour was not what it had been. He asked Dennis to spend the evening with him, at Fitzjohn's Hall, or Hamilton Terrace. For the moment, it seemed, he did not care to be alone. "Mabel will be going to bed early. She was up all night, I'm told. You'd best come up to me; the walk home afterwards won't hurt you. I don't want to have the car out again this evening." Dennis agreed to dine in Fitzjohn's Avenue.

It was after Amos had gone, but before Dennis went out to lunch, that Mabel rang up again. This time her voice was full of tears and agitation.

"I don't know what to think. He is quite delirious, he doesn't know anybody. The surgeon has been again. Fanny saw him and says he was quite satisfied, but I can't help feeling dreadfully nervous . . ."

Mabel broke down at the telephone, and Dennis promised to come round immediately after lunch and meet Dr. Lauder. Dr. Lauder would be quite frank and straightforward with him. Mabel had not liked to ask too many questions, but she had thought that the surgeon looked very grave.

"The nurses are so kind and attentive, reassuring too." This was in answer to an inquiry when she took up the telephone again. Mabel could not disguise she wanted reassurance.

If Dennis went to Grosvenor Street immediately after lunch, there would be no difficulty in his being at Curzon Street at four. He told Mr. Dolland, who was lingering about, hoping to get that matter of the tapestries settled, that it was possible he would not return to business after lunch.

"I am going to see some miniatures and drawings."

The disingenuousness of this struck him, and he hurried on: "My brother-in-law doesn't seem so well this last hour or two."

"Miniatures, drawings. Not at Christie's, are they? If so, I've missed the catalogue."

"No, a private collection."

"That's better. May I ask . . ."

"Don't ask me anything now, there's a good fellow. I'm hungry."

He was, and a little desperate to get away. He seized his hat, telling his partner he would let him know all about the collection when he saw him next. Dennis was no good at the game he was playing, he had never had any practice in intrigue. The word itself was unknown to him. To have tea with a woman, such a woman, between whom and himself a real friendship was budding; surely intrigue was no name for that? But any sort of dissimulation or concealment of his movements was new to him. He felt that Dolland, and all the world, would know that he was going to tea with Lady Diana Wayne. He seemed to have suddenly become conspicuous, or Dolland inquisitive.

A chop at the 'Blue Posts' quieted him down; he took his time over it, there was nothing to hurry about. Mabel always got excited easily, and she had been up all night. He had his cigarette, and looked at the early edition of an evening paper.

Then he walked to Grosvenor Street, and on the doorstep met Roddy Ainsworth.

"Hullo! Skipper. You here, where's Mabel? I want to see Mabel. I've been up all the way to Hamilton Terrace." Roddy seemed to think he had been badly treated, and that Mabel ought to have been at home. But when he heard about Ted's illness and the operation, he was 'awfully sorry,' and a little remorseful. He knew Amos had been sent for last night.

"Never thought of Ted, good old Ted!"

For he too had known him always. Then he brightened up:

"I say, what a devilish awkward thing it would be if it had happened to me!"

Before he had time to expatiate on the disappointment to the public, and the 'bad business' for the theatre that would ensue, the door opened, and the foreign servant, now properly dressed and in his most intelligent mind, answered even before he was asked:

"Mr. Juxton is going on very well, and the Doctors are quite satisfied." He had doubtless been coached in this answer. It was obvious, too, he did not expect them to enter, he held the door gingerly half open.

"I say, Dennis, if he's all right, can't you get Mabel down to me for a few minutes? I want to show her these . . ." 'These' were a bundle of press notices.

"Where is your mistress?" Dennis asked.

"Mrs. Juxton is in the drawing-room." Dennis was injudicious, perhaps, in not asking whether she was alone, but he never dreamed of her being with anyone. He got rid of Roddy, but not without difficulty.

"Mabel won't see anybody."

"She'll see me," Roddy answered confidently. But Dennis was firm in saying she could not be asked to leave the sick-room in order to read Roddy's notices. "To-morrow," he promised vaguely, and Roddy had to go away with that to content him. He grumbled, and said he was sure Mabel would like to see him.

Dennis went up to the drawing-room two steps at a time. He heard voices, a masculine one; he had no doubt it was Dr. Lauder's.

Fanny was in a very expensive and elaborate tea gown, all white muslin and lace, pink showing through. It made her look a little like a dressing-table. She was languorous

on the sofa. Cosmo, who had been sitting near her, rose when Dennis made his abrupt entry. Fanny was quite equal to the occasion, although so languid.

"A nice fright you gave us all last night. And all about nothing, as it turned out. Everybody, more or less, has been operated on for appendicitis." She showed her teeth in a smile, it was impossible she could still be malicious about Ted, but the impossible was true. "It is the only time Ted has tried after fashion, and he was sure to bungle it, choosing the most inconvenient day in the whole year!"

Cosmo asked:

"Have you seen Mr. Juxton? He is very pleased with the reception of the play, isn't he?"

"He doesn't even mind that Mabel's friend sang flat," Fanny struck in.

Dennis stood irresolute on the threshold. It was difficult to believe that Ted could be dangerously ill, whilst his wife and his friend were at their ease here. The jeer at 'Mabel's friend' passed him by. He had always known Fanny to be ungrateful. If she could jeer at Ted, why not at Mabel, who was nursing him, and had nursed her too, last night?

"I was so worked up by your solemn manner when we came from the Savoy that I thought it was all over! He is still looking solemn; Cosmo, just look at him."

She crouched into the corner of the sofa, and laughed. Dennis turned on his heel. She called after him.

"Don't go. Stay and have tea. Mabel is coming down."

It was dull this afternoon, even with Cosmo there. She missed her club, and the excitement of her daily gamble. Of course she had to stop at home, and make herself agreeable to the doctors. She hated Dr. Lauder, and Dr. Porter was a dry stick: the 'dry stick' had flowered a little when watered with her smiles. But she had never really quite got over her fancy for Dennis. His treatment of her

piqued it. She tried to detain him, although Cosmo was there. She was always trying to imagine Cosmo jealous, she would have liked to play off the two men, any two men, one against the other. But she was deprived of the contemplated pleasure. Dennis heard Mabel's step on the stairs, and went outside to greet her.

"He is very bad, Dennis." Mabel had evidently been crying. "I can't believe everything is as it ought to be. Dr. Lauder looks *so* anxious. Fanny says I am making a fuss. It was she who saw Dr. Porter. Dennis! I . . . I believe I'm frightened." She sobbed a little against his shoulder. He put a perfunctory arm about her, but he was very genuinely moved. He did not know what to think. It was Fanny who had seen Dr. Porter, Fanny could not be acting, she must *think* Ted was all right. As this was passing through his mind he was comforting Mabel:

"You are overtired, you mustn't let yourself give way. Fanny saw the surgeon, you say, and he was quite satisfied. All the symptoms you notice may be quite regular. When will Lauder be in again?"

"He's only just gone, he is in and out all the time."

"Has she been up?"

Mabel knew he meant Fanny. They were speaking in whispers on the landing outside the drawing-room.

"She can't bear the smell of the iodoform. It isn't as if he would know her!" Mabel made excuses, it might seem strange to Dennis that Fanny avoided the sick-room.

"He doesn't know you?"

"I'm not sure, not all the time. And oh, Dennis, he is so restless! I can't help thinking he hears voices in the drawing-room."

She dropped her own, it made her wretched to have to say it even in a whisper:

"And, Dennis, ought Mr. Merritt to be here? You know what was said."

And then she could not bear the implication of her own words, adding weakly, "I do wish they would sit downstairs, in the library. It's quite a nice room, with all those dragons." Dennis gave no heed to Cosmo's and Fanny's peculiar taste in decorations. He was thinking, too, that Cosmo ought not to be here.

Good taste, good feeling, prescribed his absence. Perhaps he did not know what had been said; but it was difficult to believe it. If Dennis did believe it, it was because Cosmo was Diana's brother. Still he ought to stay away from the house just now, although Fanny had doubtless persuaded him to the contrary.

"I'll give him a hint," he said confidently to Mabel.

But Mabel begged him not to interfere. She was frightened of offending Fanny, distressed at her own words and what might be thought to lie behind them. She wished she had not spoken, wavered, and was uncertain even of her own wishes in the matter. Dennis, too, on further consideration, thought it might be unwise to interfere.

If a hint was necessary his sister would give Cosmo that hint. So Dennis thought, after he had tried to instil his own courage into Mabel, and then left Grosvenor Street to pay his visit. He was possibly disingenuous with himself. By staying to give Cosmo Merritt his views and to see Dr. Lauder, he would have missed his appointment. But that by keeping it, by seeing Lady Diana, he would be able to put the situation delicately before her, seemed the better thing to do. Then she would advise Cosmo, restrain him. Dennis was sure she had a marvellous tact, was essentially womanly, would understand. There was no quality of heart or head with which at this time he did not endow her. It was wonderful that he was going to see her again, now, within the next ten minutes.

It was striking four o'clock when he rang the bell.

He had not realised how beautiful this Curzon Street

drawing-room was, how unlike other drawing-rooms. It was very spacious, and beyond it, adding to its size, stretched the tropical winter garden. Birds were there, bright-winged, exotic, uncaged; they sang amid the greenery. Here, as he looked about him, he saw that the walls were hung with pictures, the pictures were without varnish, the gold of the frames was dingy and tarnished, they looked as if they had hung there for a century. One great sofa was drawn up by the fire, the table beside it was invisible for the wealth of orchids upon it. There were other tables in the room, and they too were altars for flowers, for hothouse roses, and lilies from the South. Everywhere there were cabinets, this one full of rare ivories, and that of priceless Sèvres. A red lac writing table with Louis Seize mounts caught his eye, a *vitrine* full of miniatures.

But she had only kept him waiting two minutes, now she was beside him, more beautiful than ever.

"How punctual you are!"

Her smile did not hurt, her hand was in his to heal her words, and show by the little pressure that she was not offended by his punctuality. He had no more time to look at the room; he could look at nothing but her. She was in black again; there was nothing that could bring out more exquisitely the transparency of her skin, the green or hazel of her laughing eyes, they were laughing eyes this afternoon. She was glad that he was here. He knew it, and he was glad too.

"You have been in trouble. Cossy told me of your brother-in-law's sudden illness."

He had his opening, but could not avail himself of it. He had not realised how difficult it would be. He said, hurriedly, that they were still full of anxiety; Ted was certainly not yet out of danger.

Diana, standing slim and upright against the Reynolds picture, quenched its painted pallor with her more vivid

colouring, she made it look faded in its frame. One hand rested on the massed pile of cushions heaped up in the corner of the sofa, and the clinging black of her dress orientalised the colour scheme. Just so, he thought, she should have been painted. Her eyes were soft on his when she said:

"But don't let us talk of illness or trouble. Come out; I like sitting under the trees, imagining it is summer, or that I am in the South." There was a little mischief in her smile. "Cosmo asked you what you thought of the auriculas; to-day you can make up your mind."

He followed her willingly. Tea was brought out to them; they talked of one thing, then another, glancing over surfaces, trying deliberately for intimacy, missing it, because it was surfaces over which they glanced, and intimacy strikes inwards. But they were coming to it, there were depths beneath their surface talk. She had read this, and he that. Gwilt was a new name to her; Laurence Hope was an unknown poet to him. She said she loved architecture; it seemed grander to her than all the other arts, because it combined them all, lent itself to shelter them, sculpture and carving, no less than painting. She was interested to hear that this was the hobby he would have pursued if he had had leisure, if he had never married. She heard that with the eyes of his mind he saw grand and beautiful buildings, sometimes he tried to draw them. He was hardly yet at ease in talking about himself, stopping short abruptly now and again, fearing she would be bored. She had glanced at him quickly, then away, when he had said 'if he had never married.' Why had he married? What were his relations with his wife? She could not ask him, they were really only acquaintances, although they talked of friendship; skirting round the statue which they had set up, never knowing the name of the god they were fashioning, and to whom they were purposing to offer sacrifice. Diana would be the first to suspect, to recognize

the features as they emerged from the marble, to detect the bow and arrow. She at least was no stranger to Eros, and the green glades and groves wherein his temple is enshrined.

She said to him presently:

"We are *en rapport* in some curious way. When you left me last night, I felt depressed, low-spirited. I suppose, I knew instinctively of the trouble coming to you."

At that he flushed, looking at her gratefully but hesitating to tell her so.

"Ted is such a good fellow, straight as a line; he has had bad luck all through."

"I am so sorry."

But she hardly knew for what she was sorry. She did not know Ted, so it could not have been that.

"I knew you would be."

"But he is better to-day."

"His wife says so."

"She doesn't care about him?"

"Sometimes I think she actually dislikes him, hates him. She treats him like a dog."

"It is awful when things grow to that between husband and wife." Her eyes were retrospective, and it was his turn to wonder. So a little silence fell between them, one of many that were to come when they had got beyond surfaces.

"I think our friendship is only at its beginning, its beautiful beginning."

Now she spoke dreamily. Sitting beside her words became difficult to him, and his mind was in a tumult. He wanted to tell her how grateful he was to her for taking him as a friend; he wanted to do something for her, anything, to prove it. She went on talking:

"I don't think I have ever had a friend, a real friend. There was my mother, but she cared for hunting more than

anything in the world. As a child it seemed to me I never saw her except in a habit. After her accident she was never out of pain, and all her strength went in trying to conceal it. She was very brave, marvellously brave. There were always nurses between us, I never got close to her. . . ." She stopped.

"I understand."

"I knew you would."

She turned her beautiful eyes upon him, it seemed they were really beginning to understand one another.

"Then there was Cosmo. We were always what you call 'pals'; the two youngest, in revolt against authority. But Cosmo was delicate, he was a long time with a tutor; he had been only a year at Eton when his health broke down again. I was married whilst he was still at Cambridge; we were so seldom together."

Dennis saw the loneliness of her girlhood, he wanted to hear about her marriage, and then again he did not like to think of her intimacy with an uncongenial companion. Somehow or other it had been conveyed to him that her husband was uncongenial to her.

"Your life has been lonely, too?" And in the sincerity of his simplicity he answered.

"I don't think I felt it when I was very young. Everyone at the Vicarage was more than good to me. But I was not really intimate with Mr. Paighton. I know it now, although I did not know it at the time. Mr. Abinger was my first intimate. He had the heart of a woman, the brain of a *savant*. He knew everything. So it seemed to me then; looking back I still think he was the wisest person I have ever met, and the kindest. Nobody ever knew how charitable he was. For his sake I like all Jews, even those dirty, dishonest, half-sharp Poles and polyglots one meets in sale-rooms. They have all got hearts, hands open to their co-religionists." He paused. "When Abe Abinger

died, suddenly, without a word of warning, I knew loneliness. My God! It was as if the bottom had dropped out of the world. I'd no foothold. And that was the time my adopted father was beginning to doubt everything, the whole principles of his life. He had seemed so strong, such a pillar of strength in his faith. Now he was swayed this way and that. He had not a hand to give to me to keep me on my feet . . ." And again he thought he was talking too much about himself. Never, never, had he told anyone these things. She encouraged him softly:

"Go on, go on. I want to hear. This was when you met your wife?"

"I had always known Mabel. She was so unlike other girls, reserved, gentle. Ursula and Agatha were fond of her. She did Church work." It seemed an inadequate description. He hurried on. "She was in trouble, too. Ted was going to be married . . ."

He would not give Mabel's secret away, nor speak of what her trouble had been. "I seemed to have nothing belonging to me to take care of, to, to live for . . ." he burst out. "It sounds rotten. I don't mean I'd any thought of suicide, but if I could be of use to anybody, and she seemed what you call forlorn, nobody noticing much that she was unhappy . . ." He didn't want to take any praise for what he had done, he had to be completely honest. "It seemed a good thing all round. It gave me a place, and a home. The home at the Vicarage was being broken up. . . ." And then in final self-betrayal he admitted, "I don't think I thought very much about it, about the finality of marriage, until the very day of my marriage. I am boring you, I'm sure I'm boring you, talking so much about myself?"

"I want to know it all."

"And then you will tell me about yourself."

"All you want to know, but there is so little."

"You were unhappy in your marriage."

"He seemed a hundred years older than I was. I was only a girl. Don't question me. Let me tell you gradually; when the mood comes."

Then they glided into generalities again. It seemed that neither of them had ever had anyone to whom they could open their hearts, talk familiarly of unfamiliar things; of the emotions, never before put into words, that fine colours, a dancer's poise, a bird's song, brought suddenly to the heart. He told her quite simply, without exaggeration, of his night-walk after her dinner party, of the trees black against the grey sky, and London hushed and sleeping. He spoke, too, of the odd immense sense of power that had come to him. In one of the corners of her heart she thought it was a pity he took himself so seriously; but in the innermost centre of it, she was moved towards him in a way she had never before been moved. Light love had been offered to her more than once. Dolly gave her constancy, admiration, all he had to give; but after all he was only Dolly.

Gradually, in their low question and low response, there were more and more pauses, silences. It was after one of these she said to him, apparently without sequence or intention:

"You know why I asked you to come so early. It was because Dolly is coming at six."

"Dolly?"

"My cousin, Lord Haverford, my fiancé."

"You are not really going to marry him?"

"I am, I must."

"Must?"

"You know how poor we all are, how wretchedly, inconveniently poor. And we are all in debt, Father, Mervyn, I."

"You!"

"Yes! Don't look shocked, don't idealise me. Be tolerant. I am only a woman, full of faults. I suspect you of a little hardness, want of tolerance for weakness. I

like pretty clothes, furs, jewellery; my jointure is pitifully small. I *must* marry Dolly."

"You are going to marry Lord Haverford because he is rich. I don't believe that; that isn't possible of you! There must be some other reason if it is true. But I don't believe it is true."

She felt chilled, repelled; after all he was something of a prig. He must understand so little of women, their needs, particularly women in society with positions to keep up.

"Are you really so very horrified? I am up to my eyes in debt. I dare not tell my father; my brothers are no better off than I. . . ."

"Anything you do must be right. But I — I am not without means . . ." He said that abruptly, reddening.

"Well, I cannot marry you, can I?" She said it lightly, but the red in his cheeks deepened and all in a moment hers took fire from it, and now neither of them looked at the other.

"You said we were to be friends, real friends. You . . . you can have anything you want."

It was really difficult for him to express his meaning. He wanted to do something for her. And this at least he could do; she need not be in debt. His heart was beating, pounding against his ribs as if he were going for a fifth run at cricket from a spanking drive by his partner, when runs were wanted quickly, and he could only just scrape home before his wicket was thrown down:

"*You can have anything you want.*" It was such an impossible thing to have said. The words hung between them like the acrid and penetrating smoke from a burning house. There were sparks from it that burnt and stung. She *was* in need of money, her standard less high than his, and her upbringing different. Still his words burnt.

"You are not offering me money, are you?"

This was the moment when she knew that it was not

friendship that was coming to them. If his words burned, they thrilled also. Incoherently, not without the sense of saying something shameful, incredible, he admitted that he was, and in a hoarse voice asked why he should not, what she meant by the word friendship if he couldn't say that to her. And then he gave his version of friendship, getting up from his seat beside her, walking up and down, agitated, he hardly knew from what cause. But sitting near her, he had become suddenly aware of her sweetness, the pallor of her loveliness, and her needs, that neither her father nor her brothers in their selfishness perceived or solaced. If he had been her brother she would have wanted for nothing. They were not eloquent words in which he couched his feelings; he had but a poor gift of self-expression.

"It's rot, it's all such rot. I can't find a better word. Your brothers are different from me, they have so many wants of their own. I have hardly any, why shouldn't you have what I don't need, just because it's money? Lady Diana, forgive me; I am sure to say the wrong thing. I've got no experience, only I don't want you to marry Lord Haverford because you want anything he could give you, if I can give it you instead. I thought I shouldn't mind, but I do mind. Our friendship, our growing friendship, look how it has grown this afternoon, would be all spoilt. . . ."

His voice, or his words, or perhaps what he offered, touched her somewhere, somehow, as she had never before been touched; and she had to look away from him as he spoke. She knew now that she was in love with him, with his fine figure, and way of moving, with his voice, and the things that he was saying. So she looked away, seeing him nevertheless.

"You make me ashamed."

"There is nothing on earth to be ashamed about. Money doesn't mean anything, when one has more than one wants.

So many fellows come to me: at the Club we none of us think anything of it. I wish you would let me lend you anything you want, settle things for you. Why shouldn't you pay off all your debts? It is beastly talking about it, I know. Don't let us talk about it. Only I would be so awfully *proud* of it if you would let me make everything all right for you! *Do*, do yield to me in this. You are only a woman; it is just business. You can't marry Lord Haverford." He was stopped for argument, and brought out Margaret Lemon's dictum. "Marriage is imprisonment; a life sentence. You *can't* marry Lord Haverford. I am really almost rich. We can't talk about it, we will never talk about it again; just give me the name of your bankers."

Out of the depths in which they were floundering, she flung the mere mud of a stammering sentence.

"One cannot take money from a man, from a man one hardly knows."

Hardly knows! That cast him back upon himself, silencing him.

He left off walking about, his hurried incoherent speech was stayed.

"I beg your pardon," he said heavily, stupidly. "Of course you hardly know me."

"I didn't mean that," it was she now who was speaking hurriedly, "I am sorry I said it." She was really aflame, and saw how it was possible to lose him. "You must not be so sensitive. You are not angry with me, are you?"

There was a deprecating glance, a sudden smile, irradiating, two hands outstretched to him. "Come and tell me you are not angry."

He went over to her, not unwillingly. He was bewildered, her tone and manner had changed so completely. Now he took the hands she outstretched to him, and held them in his. Neither he nor she were cool or reasonable, but they concealed their agitation from each other.

"You didn't mean you hardly knew me?"

"No, I didn't mean that."

"And you will let me do what I want?"

Her smile was really wonderful.

"You know you are holding my hands."

Those hands of hers seemed to touch him everywhere. He felt them in his heart.

"It is so wonderful of you, more than good!"

He had understood she would accept help from him; it meant she would not marry Lord Haverford. He had kissed her hands and still held them. She was half laughing, saying incoherently that he must not do that, avoiding his eyes in which she read that it was not only her hands he would kiss. But the moment passed, and he dropped her hands, recollecting himself.

"It is so awfully good of you," he said again.

She was piqued at the ease with which he regained his self-possession. He was really embarrassed at having kissed her hands!

"I lost my temper for a moment," he really thought it was his temper he had lost, or been on the point of losing, "at the idea you would mind letting me help you. Look what you have done for me. I was so awfully down when I came in."

He was talking rapidly, because her eyes helped him so little. There was a sort of wonder in them, and doubt; her lips too were unsteady, those sweet thin lips with the delicate red softness.

He thought he had shocked or startled her; certainly he had startled himself. Her hands were as if they were still in his, and the softness of them against his lips. His blood was in a tumult; he had not known there were women like this in the world.

"I ought to be going now, you will be having other visitors. I must get back to Grosvenor Street."

He hardly knew what he was saying, he wanted to get away.

She was ready to help him to safer ground, seeing how it was with him, wondering nevertheless. He would not press an advantage; but she had been ready for him to press it. She knew that, and that she had liked her hands in his; he was astonishingly pleasant to her, and his proximity made her heart beat faster. But the retreat of him stilled it for the present; she knew it was only for the present.

"How emotional we became! But really you startled me; it has all come so quickly, our intimacy, I mean. When are you coming to see me again? For you must go now, I suppose."

Because her voice was low and hurried, and she was ready to dismiss him, he thought her shy and confused. And he had the quick man's pride in it; a new feeling for him; something of the conqueror, but then compunction. He took his leave of her abruptly, not in the least realising himself. He walked away from the house as if in a fog.

The statue she now saw so plainly smiling down upon her from the marble, was still dim to him, and fog-bound. But there was haze behind the fog, a point of light tipped the arrows; and he saw the light from the pointed arrow, although he was still blind as to where it pointed.

CHAPTER XVIII

DENNIS was curiously in a hurry to get away from the house. He had lost touch with himself, and everything seemed a little unreal. He wanted to be alone, the last hour resolved itself into pictures, and the pictures were blurred. To think of her marrying Haverford merely for pecuniary reasons was sacrilege.

When he left her it was to go back to the Gallery, where Mr. Dolland was fortunately engaged with a customer. He shut himself up in the office, pored over his bank-book, calculating and adding up. There was so much that he could spare, that neither he nor Mabel needed. Mabel was always good about money matters, making little call upon his purse; almost the only use she had for money was to give it away. Ursula and Agatha had always money for their charities, and Dennis never doubted of its source. What he had said to Lady Diana represented his real feelings. Money was a mere counter between intimates. He had learnt that among his cricketing friends; and he felt that in time he would persuade her to it. She need not have a care in the world, he knew that, his heart beating high over it. And yet that heart of his misgave him. He did not like the tumult of his feelings, these waves that surged over him. Surely he was not going to be ill. And thinking of illness, reminded him of Ted and Mabel. She had been there long enough. He would take her home, make her rest. What he told Diana was true. Mabel needed some one to care for her and look after her, she never thought of herself. He had a slightly uneasy feeling, now, that he had talked too freely of Mabel to Diana.

It was not yet half-past six. This time, when he got to Grosvenor Street he was ushered into the drawing-room with ceremony. Fanny was still not alone there. Mrs. Margaret Lemon was with her, and, to his surprise, not only Cosmo Merritt, but Lord Haverford! So Diana had not even received him, or if she had, she had quickly dismissed him. Haverford was explaining it to Cosmo as Dennis came in:

"They said she was ill, lying down. I heard you were here, and came on. It's only a headache, I suppose; she was all right a day or two ago."

It was only Cosmo's sharpness that enabled him to detect an alteration in Dennis's expression. He reassured Lord Haverford as to his sister's state of health, then launched him into a general conversation with the women.

"You called in Curzon Street, too?" he asked Dennis, carelessly. And Dennis, off his guard, said that Lady Diana had been quite well then. Cosmo's smile was enigmatic as he turned away. Keen as he was for the Haverford alliance he was glad Diana was not treating Dolly too well, that she was keeping him guessing about her feelings. The settlements had still to be considered.

To bring Margaret Lemon and Fanny together had accorded with Cosmo's sense of humour. Margaret would be sure to be witty over Fanny's little ways. That was why Margaret was here this afternoon, nominally to inquire after Ted, actually to make a study of Fanny for Cosmo's and her own entertainment. Never could she have chosen a more auspicious moment.

The advent of Lord Haverford, notwithstanding his excuse of coming to find out from Cosmo the extent of his fiancée's indisposition, could not deceive Fanny. She knew that it was her own 'sex attraction' at play again. Lord Haverford could not keep away, she had not a doubt it had affected him since that evening at the Carlton.

Here was proof indeed. Fanny brimmed over with cordiality. She was quite generous in trying to bring Mrs. Lemon into the conversation, whilst she aired a little arch familiarity with Lord Haverford. That young nobleman had of course forgotten her very existence, but was glad to be reminded of it, finding all the trouble of making talk taken out of his hands and himself being played with and made much of; and he was never averse to the drink which she offered him, nor cared where he quaffed it. Margaret, too, he appreciated, and finding himself in such congenial quarters he settled down to the enjoyment of them. Never had Fanny played the hostess in so refined a manner. She ordered Cosmo about, to show her intimacy with him, and her power generally:

"Lord Haverford will take whisky and soda, don't forget the ice. Bring up the cigarettes for his Lordship."

She was certainly impressing the foreign manservant. He could see she had titled friends. She was glad Dennis should be present when she had two such men at her beck and call. It was quite a triumph. Lord Haverford and Cosmo were competing for her favour! In these things certainly Fanny had imagination. One could see it in play as she talked a little staccato and on one note. Margaret Lemon was quietly amused, and Dennis sat down by her at the invitation of a glance; she wanted to talk to him. No one could have imagined there was serious illness in the house, everything was so gay, so normal. When Dennis asked Margaret whether she had happened to hear how Ted was going on, it seemed superfluous to expect an answer.

Margaret Lemon had been interested in Dennis since that meeting in the train, five years ago. Much water had flowed under the bridges since then, and he should be more ready to entertain her. He evaded her questions, but fell a little under the sway of her personality. Her exceptional qualities had developed, she was eminently a woman

companionable to men, evocative of the best, or worst. It was her profession, and she was skilled in it. Dennis could parry and thrust better than five years ago, but he was not more ready to talk of things that belong to a man's self alone. He was not the type of man with which that profession of hers brought her into contact. She soon realised it, for Margaret Lemon had not attained her position without qualification. For she had a position, curious, almost unique. One might have described it as an eighteenth century position, men of letters representing the young princes and bloods of that century. She had intellect, and charm, and her morality was no one's affair; it was at least classic. Dennis could but feel the charm. Yesterday he would have said he was charm-proof; to-day, only that he had an amulet. She felt the disappointment of him, abandoning presently the attempt to interest him, and turning her attention to the other occupants of the room.

Lord Haverford and Fanny were exchanging witticisms, and Fanny was more kittenish and coquettish than ever; everything was to her liking, Mrs. Lemon retaining no one's attention. A quick step on the stairs brought Dennis to his feet. He recognised it, and that it was Mabel.

"Oh, are you here, Dennis? I am so glad you are here! Dennis, Fanny, do make everybody be quiet. I am sure he hears voices; the nurses think so too: voices carry so here . . ."

She faltered, she had not expected to find so large a company, so many curious eyes upon her.

Margaret asked sympathetically how Mr. Juxton was this afternoon.

"You must tell him I came in on purpose to inquire." She had risen to her feet, realising the situation immediately. Fanny, looking evil, also rose. Mabel, almost in a whisper, implored her hurriedly to get rid of her guests.

"He has been quite conscious and spoken. He asked if

Mr. Merritt was in the house. Oh, Fanny, I am sure it distresses him; do make him go," she whispered.

"I shall do nothing of the kind. He will have to get used to Cosmo being in the house. You can tell him so." Fanny's answering whisper was brutal.

Mabel burst into tears, and Fanny going outside the room with her, shut the door behind them hastily.

"He may never get used to anything again." Mabel tried to control her tears, still she did not want to alarm Ted's wife; although she herself was almost in despair.

"Rubbish!"

Now Dennis joined them. Fanny, indignant at being disturbed in her enjoyment, said one or two bitter, biting things; they were like the enraged spit of a frightened cat. She arched her back like the cat when a dog barks at it. But Mabel was far from barking. Fanny, her back arched, spat out:

"I won't have these scenes in my house. Ted is doing very well, Dr. Porter told me so this morning. And if he isn't, what does it matter?"

She had not meant to say this, but her temper was beyond her control. She had been getting on so well with Lord Haverford, and now there was no saying what would happen. "What does it matter?" she repeated.

"Hush! Oh do hush!" Mabel said in an agony of apprehension lest a sound should be heard upstairs, and then went on: "Oh Fanny, don't, don't take it like that! You will be so sorry if you say things like that, though I know you don't mean them. I didn't know there were so many people here, or that perhaps it is your at-home day. Don't let him hear, Dennis."

Dennis answered the appeal; he opened the drawing room door for Fanny and said to her quietly:

"Go back to your guests; get rid of them. If you don't, I shall."

She tossed her head, but she knew he would be as good as his word. She could do it tactfully; already she was almost mollified at the prospect of showing her tact, impressing her guests with her womanly anxiety lest any sound should disturb the invalid. She composed her phrases. Mabel was trembling, but Dennis soothed her easily. She was no maker of scenes, and was terrified at the one she had so nearly created.

"You think then that he is very bad?" he asked, when he saw that she was again able to speak.

"He looks dreadful, dreadful! And he is uneasy about something, and so restless, so unceasingly restless. He has asked where Fanny is, if Mr. Merritt is in the house; he falls asleep before we can answer. I don't know what to do." Her tears were flowing unconsciously, she was not even making an effort to wipe them away.

"Has she seen him at all?"

"The nurses say he wouldn't know her, that he doesn't know anything he is saying, that it is only delirium." She gave a little sob. "Dennis, get rid of everybody, it is dreadful to have strangers in the house at such a time."

It seemed, however, that it was unnecessary for him to interfere. Already the visitors were departing, even before Fanny had time to get out her prepared phrases. Margaret, who felt what was going on, and wanted to be out of it, had said that it was very late, she must go. Was Haverford coming with her? It appeared that not only Haverford, but Cosmo would accompany her. Fanny collected herself sufficiently to take an elegant leave of them, her hand at the right angle, to hope Mrs. Lemon would come again, to give a parting smile to Lord Haverford, a low "I suppose I shall see you to-morrow" to Cosmo.

Then she made the scene that was to be expected. But Dennis saw it coming, and that Mabel could escape it. Mabel had gone upstairs again. She could hardly keep

away from the sick-room, her anxiety was overwhelming, and her pity for her brother like a flood. It was for Dennis's benefit alone that Fanny stamped her foot and raised her voice, and asked how dared Mabel interfere in her house, or with her guests. She said it was just like Ted to try and come between her and any scrap and possibility of pleasure. It had been Cosmo, now she supposed it would be Lord Haverford. As she said that Dennis, surprised a little glance from her eyes, to him indescribable, something like triumph, but inquiring, as if she wished to know if he had noticed Haverford's attentions to her. Dennis ignoring the triumph or the inquiry told her, quite calmly, and notwithstanding her interruptions, that Ted was *not* getting on well, and that he was far from out of danger. Then she let fall "It serves him right," and was so ashamed of her unladylike candour that he was able to quiet her. Whatever she thought, she had not meant to say that. Now she put a guard upon her tongue. She repeated what the surgeon had said to her that morning.

"The operation may have been completely successful, but the fact remains that Ted hasn't rallied from it as he ought to have done. The nurses are uneasy. Mabel tells me Lauder has been in and out all day. You ought to deny yourself to callers altogether; you ought, if you are not helping to nurse him, at least to keep the house quiet."

Dennis was carried outside himself. He had not dreamed of the state of affairs Mabel revealed, although he had been conscious of uneasiness. Fanny said again sulkily that she would not be interfered with, the house was hers.

"Very well, then I shall appeal to Mr. Juxton."

Amos's was still a name to conjure with here, he had the power of the purse. Fanny knew she was now on unsure footing with him. She gave in with a bad grace.

"I suppose I may sit in the library. It is just the thing Ted would like to force me into doing, and you too. Per-

haps you think I ought to sit in the kitchen; that would be quite in accordance with the Juxton tradition; wouldn't it?"

Having gained his object, he was quite content she should continue to spit. He had the strongest possible desire to lock the drawing-room door, and put the key in his pocket. He would have done anything to keep poor Ted's sick-room in peace. But he hardly felt himself justified. Amos could do it, but he could not.

It was perhaps unfortunate that Roddy Ainsworth should call again, and at the very moment when Fanny was going into the library on the ground floor, upon which Dennis had insisted.

Roddy's voice carried. He was questioning the servant about Mr. Juxton, and went on to ask for Mrs. Passiful. He said he must see her, if only for a moment; his voice was undoubtedly raised.

Fanny said, spitefully, to Dennis, as she passed into the room:

"Cosmo is to be forbidden the house, but Mabel can have what callers she likes talking in the hall."

Dennis told Roddy that Mabel would not come to him. Roddy's hands were full of newspaper cuttings and his eyes of anger.

"But she must see these. Will you take them up to her? It's a conspiracy, that's what it is. Talk about a fair and unprejudiced press! After this I don't think you can say that, anyway. Have you ever read anything so unfair, so spiteful, as the evening papers?"

Dennis got rid of him with difficulty.

"Very bad, is he? Very bad! I'm sorry. I say, Dennis, this wouldn't make any difference? I mean if anything happened, Amos Juxton won't shut the theatre, will he?"

Dennis was impatient with him, with the egotism that

only considered his own interests at such a moment. After he had gone, Fanny called Dennis into the library. It was dignified by that name, but the elaborate scheme of Japanese decoration left no room for books. Fanny could not bear to be by herself, quarrelling with her brother-in-law was more to her taste.

"Is it part of the orders that I'm to sit here alone?" she began. "I have been turned out of my own bedroom. Don't you think it hard upon me to be turned out of my bedroom, *and* drawing-room?" Now she was plaintive and appealing.

It was true that the doctors had insisted upon a larger apartment for Ted. Even at this late hour of the day, Fanny thought it possible to enlist Dennis's sympathies. Her amazing vanity misled her. She still thought she had only seriously to try her wiles upon him for success to be hers. They were such cheap wiles too. And his mind was full of another woman, soft-voiced, white-handed, gracious, a Venus among women.

"I should think you would be very glad to do what you could for poor Ted," he answered simply. "You are treating it lightly, you have made up your mind he is out of danger, and that the surgeon knows more than the nurses and Lauder and Mabel. But I don't think Mabel would be in the state she is if it were all plain sailing. Take my advice and show a little more consideration, you'll be sorry if you don't. It's not yet been explained why Ted was allowed to get into such a state before the doctor was sent for! If you don't care, at least have the decency to pretend you do. You can keep Merritt out of the house, for instance. I heard you pressing him to come again; he didn't want to come back."

At that she broke out, her rage, choked in her throat, turning the words that came through to yellow venom.

"I won't be dictated to by you as to who I may or

may not have in my own house. Do you suppose Cosmo is more to me than that wretched long-haired actor is to Mabel? It suits you to pretend not to know about him and Mabel. . . ."

For half an instant Dennis actually failed to grasp her meaning.

"They sit closeted together for hours, pretending to practise. I'd like to know *what* they practise."

Even then it was difficult to believe his ears. Mabel needed no defence, he saw her as she had been last night, comforting Fanny, believing in her grief. Fanny looked at him to see the effect of her words, maliciously, but yet sullenly.

"Everybody is talking about them, and about how clever it was of Mabel to make her father take a theatre for him. Mabel is far cleverer than any of you know, subtler." "Subtler" was an echo of Cosmo, a word he had taught her.

"You really are the vilest-tongued, vilest-thinking woman . . ." Mabel needed no defence. Utter disgust of herself was all she saw in his expression, what more he would have said, or she have seen, cannot be known. For both of them heard Amos's voice in the hall, and to pursue such a theme before Amos both of them felt to be impossible.

Amos bustled in with his confident:

"Well, how is he? Going on well?"

Fanny shrugged her shoulders, and said she was no judge, she wasn't supposed to know, nor Dr. Porter either, although he was the greatest surgeon of the day. Dennis and Mabel were not satisfied. Amos hardly waited for her to complete her sentence. He turned to Dennis for confirmation:

"Not satisfied? Why, what's wrong? What does Lauder say?"

Lauder said it himself a little later, interrupting them in the middle of a strange, uncongenial dinner which Amos

insisted upon Dennis sharing. Amos did not spare comment upon Fanny's housekeeping either, or her incompetent servants.

"No wonder Ted spends more than his income! And this is what he gets for it. Well, well! I shall have to talk things over with him when he gets about again."

This muddled, vilely cooked meal Dr. Lauder interrupted. After that, all was confusion and quickly growing terror. Death was hovering over the house. Amos went pale at the shadow, behaving characteristically. It was impossible such a thing could be hovering over him, Amos Juxton. Ted was his only son, and for him he would spend money like water, pour it out.

"The boy must be saved. Have another doctor, and another surgeon; old brandy, oxygen, spare no expense. The thing is impossible, incredible. The boy is so young, and he has a fine constitution, my own constitution." Amos thought it must be somebody's fault, everybody's fault, he was very difficult to deal with.

Dennis had his work cut out for him in the dreadful hours that followed. He had to stand between Amos and hastily summoned doctors, between Amos and pessimistic nurses he persisted in questioning, Amos and grief-stricken, broken-down Mabel, who could no longer pretend the hopefulness which she could not feel. Only Fanny succeeded in avoiding Amos's anger; for Fanny kept out of his way, out of everybody's way, sulkily.

Amos, however, after insisting that Ted's temperature must be lowered, and blaming everybody, suddenly collapsed, weakly admitting his real, his pressing, his overwhelming fear.

"Not that, not that. My poor boy! Dennis, it can't be true; they'll have to save him, somehow. Tell them I don't care what it costs me."

Fanny proved helpful at the last. Amos actually turned

to her for comfort, away from all the others whose pitying looks confirmed the desperate truth. Fanny said obstinately that she stuck to what Dr. Porter told her in the morning, — the operation had been entirely successful. If the operation had been entirely successful, why should Ted die? Amos paled visibly at the word, but hung upon what she was saying, and repeated it, weakly.

"That's what I want to know . . . why?"

Fanny believed what she was saying, that was the curious part of it. They had not persuaded her to believe her freedom was near. She resented that Ted was occupying everybody's attention, his doctors, nurses, family filling the house. Her thoughts ran somewhat like this:

"It is so like Ted to choose a time like this to be ill. Just when I might be having such a good time. Mrs. Lemon knows everybody, and I could be going out with her. Lord Haverford is certainly attracted . . ."

In her favour it must be said that one cannot control one's feelings, and she really disliked the poor lout who had given her his love and everything else he had to bestow. He seemed, had seemed for a long time, to stand between her and the consequence she desired.

Toward midnight, however, a change for the better did take place, justifying her attitude, and making Amos belaud her extravagantly. "*She* was the only one who had a head on her shoulders. She knew better than all the doctors." He rebounded so quickly that they were all confounded, not knowing what to think in face of his confidence, and Fanny's contemptuous:

"Didn't I tell you so? Ted is not the sort of person one need be anxious about."

There was no doubt the temperature had fallen, and the pulse was stronger. Dr. Lauder admitted it. It was he who insisted that Amos must not remain in Grosvenor Street.

"Why don't you take him home again with you?" he said to Dennis. And in a lower tone, "He ought not to be left alone."

"But is Mabel going to sit up another night?"

"I'll make her lie down in the drawing-room. She is worried about you and her father and I should like to tell her you are together. Don't let him agitate himself more than you can help. It doesn't matter in the least if he calls us all fools, and thinks we are bungling the case. He can concentrate on that: it will suit him better than wondering what the upshot will be. I don't know myself. I wish I did. As I told you last night the operation was a fighting chance. Well, so is the oxygen; and we've the strychnine as a reserve force. But I don't like the look of him. . . ."

He admitted that to Dennis, although he had reported an improvement to Amos, and Fanny had made the most of it. "Look after your father-in-law, he is not as young as he used to be."

Dr. Lauder had a professional eye. This affair had certainly shaken Amos a good deal. And there might be worse to come.

Dennis would rather have been alone, to-night of all nights. But he took charge of Amos.

Passing down Curzon Street in the motor — Amos partially reassured, and content that Dennis should be with him to hear all he had to say about doctors in general, and illness, and Ted's inherited fine constitution — Dennis caught a glimpse of Cosmo entering the house with a latchkey. There was only one house in Curzon Street for Dennis. He had an absurd sudden resentment of Cosmo's latchkey, an absurd sudden envy of his easy access to her. There was no time to remember what he had said to her only this afternoon, or she to him; if it lay warm on his heart, or uneasily on his conscience.

What he had to do at the moment, and he set himself to

do it manfully, was to say the same thing over and over again to Amos, with conviction. He "thought the worst was over." He was "sure Ted was going to pull through after all." He had "no doubt at all everything possible had been done, and was being done." He believed "Dr. Porter was the finest surgeon in the world, and he had complete confidence in Dr. Lauder." They could easily have another consultation to-morrow.

It was true Ted had become the centre of Amos's self-centred world. For the moment he had forgotten everything else. Dennis tried him with the theatre, the critics, the box office, but nothing held him.

CHAPTER XIX

Cosmo let himself into his father's house with a latch-key. He had been living at home since the day that Ted had turned upon him and made that ugly scene. Even in retrospect Cosmo winced at the thought of it, execrating Fanny, who had brought it about. Cosmo was conscious of his good taste, and the scene with Ted had revolted him. Nothing Fanny could say, and she had said a great deal, could induce him to go on living in Ted's house after the boy had once shown that he did not want him there. Cosmo had his point of conscience; Ted was a fool, but his disciple nevertheless, his humble admirer. He had really tried over and over again to make Fanny behave better to him. Whatever had been, or were, his own relations with Fanny, he had never had any illusions about her. He found her amusing, and she had become a habit with him. But it was a habit of which he had been thinking seriously of breaking himself before this illness of Ted's assumed so serious a complexion and seemed likely to precipitate matters. Cosmo knew he could take care of himself, but he was certainly not ignorant of Fanny's tenacity and strength of purpose. He knew what she would expect of him, and that her expectations would be disappointed. Unless — well, Amos and his millions had always to be considered!

Amos must be getting on for seventy, and he was a man of plethoric habit. If anything 'happened to Ted,' which was a euphemism to cloak what seemed more than likely was going to happen to Ted, there was no one to inherit Amos's millions but Fanny, or Mabel. He had talked things over with Margaret; that was a habit much earlier formed than

the Fanny habit; and Margaret, although she had her own view of Fanny, had counselled him to patience. From first to last his connection with Juxton's had put money in his pocket. There was no reason it should not put more. The wary, grasping policy of his father's great political leader should be his on this occasion. He would "wait and see." Ted might not die. Amos might live to be a hundred. Cosmo must '*ca' cannie.*' This had been Margaret's counsel when he had walked away with her from Grosvenor Street.

"She will wheedle him; if anything should happen, she will manage to wheedle Amos," were the words of Margaret's that were still in Cosmo's mind when Dennis saw him on the doorstep of his father's house.

Cosmo had not expected to find his sister sitting up; it was late, and as a family they were in the habit of disregarding each other's movements. But seeing a light in the drawing-room, he went in.

Diana had been dreaming ever since Dennis had left her that afternoon; she had denied herself to Dolly, sending down that message about her headache. She had dreamed over her dressing and dinner. Since dinner she had fallen to dreaming again. Never had she met a man like this one who had been with her in the afternoon, so generous, so chivalrous, so unselfish. She let herself ignore the knowledge that he was a married man. With full consciousness of the frailty of the word friendship on which they were relying, she yet let herself forget how he was bound. He had implored her not to sacrifice herself to Haverford, to let him save her from such a possibility. She dwelt upon what might happen if she did what Dennis Passiful asked of her. He would give her everything she needed. She sensed the lavishness of his generosity. And in return . . . in return? It was then her dreaming thrilled her, and she envisaged the incredible.

She knew the shibboleths of the little world in which she dwelt, and what would be thought of his wish to pour his fortune into her lap. Some of her friends would have accepted his offer, laughing at him, nevertheless, withholding repayment. Diana knew some women who would have done this. But she was not like that. She was moved by it, and the remembrance of words and looks, of the kiss on her hands. Perhaps a kiss was not new to her; but Dennis's kiss had been new. Again and again the restraint of it thrilled through her. It had been a touch of the lips, scarcely a kiss at all, as she had thought of kisses, in nights since her widowhood, when the climate was Eastern, and imagination grew sensuous amid the heat and the spice-scented air. Nevertheless she liked conjuring back this shadow of a kiss, thinking of how it might be if she fired him. For truly he was a man of men. All the hours since he left her had been full of this. She did not want the impression of it to fade.

Because of her mood, perhaps because of his, brother and sister were in tune this evening; their young years of 'palship' warm between them.

"All alone by yourself? Where's the governor?"

"He went down to Denham to-day; something to say to Vansittart, I fancy, or Vansittart to him. I was just going to bed."

Cosmo threw himself into an easy chair.

"Don't go. Stay and have a cigarette with me."

"Give me one of yours then, a *Lucana*. I've none of mine down here."

He gave her a cigarette, even stayed from his easy chair long enough to light it for her.

Diana's eyes were filmy and dreaming.

"Anybody been here?" he asked curiously. Cosmo was always curious about women, and he wanted to see what she would tell him. But he knew the way to obtain their confidence was by not asking for it, so he shifted his ground

quickly when he saw her prepared to deny that she had had a visitor.

"I suppose somebody has been dunning you?" he went on carelessly. "These West End tradesmen are such scoundrels they think we have nothing to do but supply them with ready money to squander. I suppose they *do* squander it, by the way," he added thoughtfully.

Diana was his sister, but he saw that she was a very beautiful woman, an unusually beautiful woman. And to-night she was sitting alone, her eyes dreamy.

"Oh no, I was not dreaming of a dun," she said, smiling.

"So you admit you *have* been dreaming."

"We all dream sometimes, I suppose."

"It is the usual thing. You should dream of a man, I of a woman."

"I suppose so; although, probably, you make it plural."

"And were your dreams of Dolly?"

"Of Dolly?" contemptuously.

"Why not?"

"Don't be foolish!"

"Of whom, then? Confide in me."

They both laughed, the short laugh without mirth that meant the impossibility of sentimental confidences between them. And yet, when he had rung and procured the drink he wanted, when he was really at ease, and evidently inclined for conversation, she asked him, abruptly, a little inconsequently:

"Do you believe in Quixotism, Cossy, in pure unselfishness; fine actions without any *arrière pensée*, a generosity that gives without hope of return?"

He gave her a quick look. She was leaning forward, her chin supported on her hand; the fire threw a strange red light upon her black hair, played on the pallor of her face; he could not follow her thoughts, although he had an intuition of them; incredible, yet not the less interesting for that.

He knew Dennis for a Quixote, and that Dennis had been with her that afternoon. As he could not follow her thoughts, he let his own have sway, and answered carelessly:

"There are always new fools. Each man for himself, and the devil take the hindermost, is the rule. But I've met the exception. I know a man, for instance, who was in love with a musical comedy actress. She was utterly promiscuous, and had as much conscience as a garden rake. But to him she gave nothing, barely a civil word. She had thousands in cash from him, ropes of pearls, enough diamonds to make a chandelier. In return he was given the privilege of taking her mother out to supper when she was otherwise engaged. She was always good to her mother, and considerate, preferring her as a chaperon when a chaperon was the correct thing. At the moment when my Don Quixote was wooing her with his bank balance, the gallant in attendance had dispensed with chaperons. Don Quixote had entire charge of the old party, night after night. He looked upon it as a mark of confidence, that she trusted him with her mother! The mother was a charwoman, by the way, or a dresser at the theatre, something quite incredible, without aitches, in a black bonnet with strings."

"That is a story you are making up."

"It is as true as death."

He gave a little shudder; the word death to-night had an ugly sound. Not that he, either, quite believed that Ted was dying.

"I know the man well, a short, stout, melancholy fellow, with a head too large for him. He has beautiful ideals. I think he has been in an asylum once, probably will be again. Why are you asking? Who has been playing Quixote to you?"

It would really be amusing if that cricketing prig, Dennis Passiful, had been caught by Diana. Dennis was the least interesting of all the Juxton *ménage* to Cosmo, he had such an infernal habit of impeccability.

"Is it Passiful?" He could not help smiling. A whole phantasmagoria of amusing possibilities played before his eyes. "Go on, tell me all about it."

Diana, very naturally, was not disposed to go this extreme length, but she did admit that she found Mr. Passiful had a vein of Quixotry in his character. This admission was quite enough for Cosmo; it made him more curious than before.

"Does he want to pay your debts? He is simply swimming in money. Why not let him? He might pay mine too; his father-in-law does not seem anxious to do it, although I am making him a great literary reputation, an almost European reputation."

"Didn't Amos Juxton write his own book?" she asked indifferently.

"Well, not entirely." Cosmo settled his glass more firmly in his eye. "I doubt if he knows the meaning of 'building up a sentence'; he would question whether a paraphrase should come before the joint, or be served as an *entremet;* looks upon a split infinitive as something you take with soda, on which there is a forty per cent. profit."

"You know, in your way, Cossy, you are a far greater blackguard than Mervyn."

"Of course. Come to that, we are all blackguards. The Governor's Liberalism has done it, set our perspective awry. But that has nothing to do with Dennis Passiful. Don't you let him go. He will be worth more than Haverford in a few years' time. The tradespeople may still be allowed to trade when the land has been filched from the men whose ancestors fought for it, and for their country." Even Cosmo could be banal, but he had a genuine belief in heredity, and the value of lineage.

"Don't let him go?" she repeated. She was used to Cosmo in what she called his feudal moods; she brushed that part of his speech aside. "Not let him go! As rich

as Dolly! But what does that matter? To me, I mean. He is a married man; he told me so himself."

"Well, yes, there is that little objection. But I fancy it is one that need not be in your, or his, way." Cosmo's humour was difficult to follow, difficult sometimes for himself to restrain, and he was naturally self-indulgent. He threw his next words into the air as a *ballon d'essai*, there was probably enough truth in them for his purpose:

"Passiful's wife has a lover, a long-haired actor, took the part of Seraphino in 'Charles Auchester,' sings out of tune. It is wheels within wheels there, and these happened to jog round in a way that suited me. It was Passiful's wife who got the play put up, it's a rotten play; and she got the man engaged. I did not oppose her, I rather gather I should have been strong enough if I had; but I wanted Amos to have a theatre, and neither of my plays were quite ready."

"She has a lover! Dennis Passiful's wife has a lover! That insignificant little woman!"

That was the only part of his speech that interested her.

"Certainly. Why not?" The *ballon d'essai* was throwing out fireworks; he had only to fan it to see them pop and explode in the air. "The plainer the woman the more devoted the lover; it is the law of compensation."

Cosmo had heard Fanny's version of Mabel's intimacy with Roddy; he was not sufficiently interested in Mabel to doubt it. Men's tastes were various, thank the Lord! Mabel might have hidden virtues. Certainly they were not visible, although her blue eyes were soft. Cosmo knew some women, plain ones, who had undoubted attractions. Perhaps Passiful's wife was one of them. Anyway it would be really funny to see 'The Immaculate Exception,' as he often called Dennis, in Diana's toils. There might be quite an amusing imbroglio. They were all so virtuous, Amos, and Passiful himself.

"But does he know it?"

"Husbands never know. Sometimes they guess — wrong."

"Cossy, *do* be serious!"

But if Cossy had been serious he would not have been Cossy, with abilities running to seed, and no more morality than a dog-fish. He rallied Diana now on her interest in Dennis Passiful. Without the least idea of what was in her mind, looking upon the Haverford marriage as a certainty, and a very good certainty for Diana, the family, and all concerned, he nevertheless calculated Dennis's income to her, increasing it by tens, dwelt mockingly on his early tendency to churchgoing, high principles, the nobility of his nature, throwing doubt on her ability even to get up a flirtation with him.

Diana rose presently. She knew Cosmo was mocking her, that he had scented her weakness, would exploit it for his entertainment if it pleased him to do so. But, perhaps without intention, he had given her something new to dream about, a wild new thought.

Cosmo asked her not to leave him; he said he was feeling dull, depressed. It was quite true. No one ever disliked Ted Juxton except his wife. Cosmo certainly was distressed at his condition, wanted him to get well.

"You really are such an uncommonly good-looking woman. And you've wasted your good looks, you've wasted them disgracefully up to now. That's the governor's fault. You ought never to have married Wayne, nor, having married him, to have been satisfied with so poor a settlement. You ought to have captured a Duke, or at least a South African millionaire; there are still a few about. Of course if you had any success with Passiful you could get him to divorce his wife. We have never had a Bond Street shopman in the family, nor an unencumbered twenty thousand a year. He can't make less than that."

He wanted to detain her. He had no inclination to go to

bed, nor to sit on, alone, and think of Ted, to whom he had been a hero. His quick intuition told him that Diana would stay if he talked of Dennis Passiful. But he was mistaken in thinking that this way of speaking of him would hold her. She thought it vulgar and unworthy, even of Cossy, to bring in Bond Street and trade. What had that to do with them? She had family enough for both, and what good had it done her? She had missed happiness, and something more than happiness; goodness. Already she knew that.

The first lesson love teaches is the lesson of the unworthiness of those at whom the arrow is aimed. Lady Diana Wayne had quite sufficient of her brother's ability to recognise the difference between Dennis Passiful's standard of conduct and her own. She had not been good as he thought her, not very good. But she felt there were immense possibilities of virtue in her; it had been opportunity she had lacked. She could not be absolutely faithful and loyal to an old husband who made no allowances, who was so much away. But on the whole she had not been a bad wife to him. Temptations she may have had, but she had kept within the traces of the matrimonial car to which she was harnessed. She had never even contemplated running away, although so tired, so often tired, of the shafts.

They were all so poor; she had had to marry for money. The astuteness of her late husband's lawyers, her father's indolence or indifference, the non-appearance of the expected heir, had made her sacrifice useless. If she had married for love, did marry for love, her character could grow, she could be true to her instincts.

She never doubted it was true that Dennis could divorce his wife; he had been reserved in speaking of her.

She would not stay at Cossy's bidding, but went swiftly, eagerly to her own room, to think over this new idea that had been given her, turn it over in her mind. She was full of Dennis and his personality; she was in the attitude of mind

towards him when every possibility becomes a probability, and soon a certainty. She would be willing to make a sacrifice for him. Not that there would be any question of marrying beneath her; he was anybody's equal; and, after all, nobody knew whose son he really was. She built quite a romance on the doubt there had once been in Mr. Paighton's mind, and which had got about, as to whether Passiful was really the name of Dennis's father; a doubt, by the way, for which there was no foundation.

But before she closed her eyes in sleep that night she knew that whether he was the son of Royalty in disguise, or of genius undisguised, there was no other man in the world for her. And even in sleep she felt the brush of his lips on her hands. She was curiously conscious of the Joseph in him. If it had not been for that, the kiss might have reached her lips.

CHAPTER XX

Cosmo intended to keep away from Grosvenor Street for a few days, he had a great sense of propriety, if little pleasure in exercising it. But he reckoned without Fanny, who sent him little notes, necessitating answers, who telephoned to him constantly, making hourly demands, or appeals. Fanny, feeling that Cosmo was bent on eluding her, lost sight of everything else but the desire to retain him. Cosmo's attentions to her had always varied; she had never been as certain as she pretended. It had amused him to decorate the house; he had wanted to make an experiment, and at some one else's expense. Then he thought he would like to sleep in a Chinese bed, immense and marvellous, with ornament of red lac, and carved wood; of jade, and with jewelled Buddhas at each panoplied corner. He thought that he would like to sit in a library, dragon-haunted and with black ceilings. But even before he had heard Fanny's scream, and had intervened between her and Ted's fury, he had loathed his handiwork and his position, recognising the antique bed as made up from many other things, and the black ceilings as merely perverse. Fanny had a trick of making awkward positions for him, long before Ted's illness she was beginning to get on his nerves. He thought that Crockford's would have helped to rid him of her. Fanny was the very woman for such hotbeds of scandal and intrigue, as the mixed bridge clubs. She would be kittenish with all the men, cattish to all the women, and she had the instincts of a gambler. He pictured her old age, spent playing *chemin de fer* in foreign casinos, her cruel hands

raking in the five-franc pieces, or trembling at parting with them.

Now came Ted's illness, and complicated matters. He could have shunted her so easily, so gradually. Now it might be more difficult. Such thoughts somewhat troubled his complicated days.

Fanny, in a panic at his indifference, his inattention, putting it down to that awkward entry of Mabel's, to Lord Haverford's attentions to her, and hers to him, or anything but the true cause, never dreaming but that her charms would recall him, if only she had the opportunity to exercise them, found Ted's illness unconscionably slow. In the next few days she reported him better, or reported him worse, making always the appeal to Cosmo not to leave her alone in her anxiety. She said she did not know what she would do if she were left alone. Cosmo had always the fear that an acute attack of confessionitis might seize her; and Amos was still an asset.

In the week that Ted lingered Cosmo and she sat together day after day, in the black-ceilinged and be-dragoned library, bulletins from the doctor, bulletins from the nurses, bulletins from Mabel, reaching them at intervals. What was in their hearts they concealed from each other. When there was bad news Fanny's hard eyes searched Cosmo's for something he never spoke, but when the news was good, she feared to read relief there.

Dennis, too, came in and out. He could not interfere now that they sat downstairs, out of hearing of the sick-room. Mabel was a pathetic figure, her eyes red from tears and sleeplessness, her hair and dress neglected, the sick-room her whole world. She felt she was being selfish to Dennis, to her father, but she could not be anywhere else. Sometimes Ted recognised her, once he stretched out to her a feverish hand; he said her name now and again, and that he had been a rotten brother. Once she persuaded Fanny to the room.

Mabel had never heard the accusation Fanny had brought against her, would hardly have heeded it. Her whole heart and soul was in this fight against Death they were all making. In his fevered, restless hands Ted held them all. Fanny knew now that Ted would never get better, whatever view she conveyed downstairs. At the last she came often to the sick-room; five and six times a day. The visits were short ones, but that was due to the strength of her feelings, apparently, and she told Mabel that she could not bear the sight of his sufferings. So the nurses understood, and so it was conveyed to Amos. Amos, too, could not bear the sick-room after he had once seen Ted lying there so unlike himself, and dignified through his suffering. To Amos, too, he said in that hoarse whisper, which was all that weakness had left him, that 'he'd been a bad son, a selfish brute . . .' "No, no, my dear boy." But Amos had not been able to keep his tears back, nor his own dignity intact when Ted said he had been a bad son. Amos got out of the room as quickly as he was able. After that he was for ever sending the grapes and peaches that were never even shown to Ted, asking for new doctors, fresh treatment. Amos was really a pitiful sight as the time wore on, monotonously hopeless, nobody being found to say that Ted would get well. Amos said often that he had never been a bad son to him.

There came another day, however,—there are always such days in illness, even when the illness is mortal,—that the bad symptoms halted, the temperature fell again, Ted slept, and slept as one at ease, the tortured look on his grey face passing away for the moment.

Mabel fetched Fanny up to look at him, to peep through the door. She wanted her father to come too. Poor soul! She could never be brought to believe that Fanny cared less than she. She only thought her more unused than herself to illness. There were poor patients she and the sisters from the Vicarage had helped to nurse, hospitals they

had visited. Fanny did not know; poor Fanny! Mabel thought of her always now as 'poor Fanny,' and had heart-ache over her. She was endlessly considerate of her, mothering her, hovering about her with beeftea, telling her she must 'keep up her strength, and courage.'

There was no real improvement, not even to-day; the sleep was the sleep of exhaustion. Mabel knew it, but to Fanny she murmured 'hope.' Long days without hope are unsupportable. But at least the pain had abated and she fetched Fanny up to see him whilst he looked at ease.

"He is really better?" Fanny asked; but she did not lower her voice as Mabel did. Ted had been so little conscious lately, and Fanny had not the art of the sick-room.

A quiver passed over his face at the sound of her voice; one saw it as the ripple on the surface of a pool. The nurse, who had been in the dressing-room, busied in the preparation of some food or dressing, came hurrying in at the sound of that unlowered voice.

She made a quick sign that Fanny should go out of the room.

It was then that Fanny's self-control left her. Mabel had feared for her composure when Ted moaned, or wandered, never doubting it would hold when he slept at ease. But, as Fanny declared, and Mabel always believed, the sight of him sleeping, and the belief that he was at last out of danger, made her burst into loud sobs. Before she had time to hurry away — she said afterwards she had meant to hurry away — he opened those faithful eyes of his, and saw her. They were difficult to focus, dying eyes, looking afar at what the living never see; there dawned a slow recognition in them; he seemed to withdraw them from that distance.

"Fan," he said, "Fan."

The note was half of fear, half of surprise, but as consciousness struggled to him it was only love one heard in it.

"Who's been making you cry, Fan?" The voice was hoarse, difficult, unrecognisable, but ineffably tender. "What's the matter? Come to me." He made an awful and ineffectual effort to raise himself, to stretch out his arms for her. The nurse and Mabel hurried to him, but it was Fanny he wanted, only Fanny. She threw herself crying on the bed; and those weak, dying arms tried to hold her, as they had tried ineffectively to hold her all these years past.

"Don't, don't cry. I haven't done anything wrong again, sweetheart, darling, have I?"

She mumbled some incoherent words. Perhaps they were a plea for forgiveness. If so, he must have meant to grant it. He almost sat up, trying convulsively to draw her to him. She seemed to shrink, to struggle away from him. A sudden, a dreadful change came into his face then, the lips tried to move again, but fell apart silent, and a little foam gathered about his mouth as his head fell back on the pillow.

Nurse pulled the bell violently, the rope came off in her hands, she was summoning more help. But it was too late, she knew it whilst she pulled. As far as Ted was concerned Fanny's wild hysterical shrieks and self-reproaches fell on deaf ears. Mabel, raining tears, put loving arms around her:

"Come away, dear, come away, it is all over . . . he doesn't hear you."

She forgot her own grief in Fanny's, forgot everything but this poor wife. Fanny was borne away at last, almost by force. Whether it was real fear of death's presence, whether some momentary pang of conscience had smitten her, or if it were only the cold continuance of a policy, can never be known. She went from one hysterical fit into another. When Mabel's pitiful, loving arms could no longer hold her she made what seemed like a desperate

attempt to throw herself out of the window. She said she wanted to die too, and all of them were frightened at her violence. She threw herself against the wall of the room, knocking her head, she flung herself on the floor.

Dr. Lauder, hastily summoned, doubted the reality of her attempt at suicide, scoffed at the idea that she was out of her mind with grief. He had no doubt that she had real cause for self-reproach. Mabel did all that a gentle woman could do for another in such a case. She tried to find comforting words, Christian words. She found, without difficulty, tears of sympathy. But the hysteria continued, and resource had to be had to drugs. Fanny herself, feeling faint and ill between her paroxysms, found the brandy or whisky bottle did her more good, and surreptitiously she added the one to the other, passing in this way the days between Ted's death and his funeral, half unconscious, dazed, apparently, with grief. She did not omit, however, to order a sable garniture of widow's woe, to which the pallor induced by drugs, hysteria, and stimulants added the necessary attraction. And Cosmo had one of her little notes, begging him to order for her a lovely wreath.

"You know the flowers he loved best. Choose them for me, don't spare expense. Think of a suitable inscription. I'm so distracted, I can't call to mind a single quotation. There is no one but you I care to ask, I'm so alone."

Cosmo felt a little sick, but he did what Fanny asked: he was even subtle over it. "Will this do?" he wrote to Fanny. "*He lies in the Peace of the great Release.*"

And Fanny responded gratefully. She was just equal to the exertion of writing, but not to an understanding of Cosmo's subtlety.

Ted's death struck Amos in some sensitive place, unsuspected even by his intimates. Perhaps, after all, he had had hopes of Ted, those sad hopes that never materialised doubling his grief and sense of loss. Ted was gone, and

the hopes, too. It had seemed neither age nor death could have touched Amos Juxton. Now it was as if an earthquake were about him. He no longer stood upright on his feet, but swayed as if a chasm was before him, luring him to its brink. Even about the arrangements of the funeral he changed his mind more than once.

"I leave it all to you, my boy, I leave it to you, what does it matter? Shut the place or leave it open, the theatre too. I don't care. I never thought it would come to this."

Dennis, who had his own affairs to think of, had time for none of them. Everything devolved upon him, and there was much that needed attention. Poor Ted had not been a business man. Money that had been given him for one purpose had been used for another. Amos had given a cheque when they moved into Grosvenor Street. But the decorations, the new furniture and the old, were unpaid for, household bills had been outstanding for months, there were debts to tailors, hosiers, dressmakers, even jewellers.

Fanny disclaimed all responsibilities. She said she 'knew nothing about money, Ted had kept everything in his own hands.' Strangely enough, however, there were two accounts about which she gave a ready explanation. They were both from betting men, and in each case showed a profit. Fanny claimed both cheques. She said, a little mysteriously, that they were commissions Ted had for friends of his who had been unable to get enough money 'on' with their own book-maker. She would not divulge the names of these friends. She said that it was a question of honour, and their names must not transpire. She would see that they had their money. Dennis, naturally, would have liked details. But Amos expressed himself quite satisfied. This was the time he told Dennis again that he had never been fair to Fanny. Fanny was quite listless and played the broken reed before him, as if "nothing mattered now." Amos would not go to the house after

Ted died, but listless Fanny, in her overwhelming weeds, went to him once to Fitzjohn's Hall, and moved him by her wan and languid looks. That was the day the bookmaker's accounts had appeared, and Dennis claimed them for the estate.

"You never did like her, my boy, and she's told me how it came about. You were too free with her, and she isn't one that thinks nothing of a kiss. But then of course she was going to be your sister-in-law. I told her it wasn't likely you meant any harm. I daresay she misunderstood what you said or did. I recollect there was a misunderstanding, a coolness between you from the first."

"Too free with her!" Even from Fanny that was an astounding way to put it. "Lying little cat," was what he thought. "Too free with her," was what he exclaimed, and the tone of it was a contradiction, although Amos paid no heed to it.

"Before either of you were married. But she was engaged to my poor boy even then. He thought the world of her, Dennis. We must do what we can for her, poor girl! And let bygones be bygones. There was not much harm in a kiss. I know you well enough to be sure you meant no harm, no disrespect to her, or disloyalty to Ted." He sighed. "I'm sure I don't know what is going to become of her. She's very young to be alone in the world. I know Mabel will be kind to her, and I must see what can be done. Don't question the bills. Poor boy, if he blundered, he has paid for it. It isn't as if I can't afford it. My head is not what it used to be; I don't sleep well either just now. Don't bother me about details, there's a good boy. Just pay everything, it's all I can do for him."

Dennis wanted to know what freedom he was supposed to have shown towards Fanny. But it was useless to contradict the lie or implication to which Amos alluded. Fanny had probably made her story good, as she did the

one about the book-makers. The hundred or so of ready money she became possessed of in this way would probably prove useful, and he hardly grudged it to her, though he, no less than Amos, when the figures were fairly before them, wondered at the amount Ted had managed to get through.

Mabel was very good to Fanny in those early days after Ted's death. She offered to stay on with her, or that Fanny should come to Hamilton Terrace. She did not know how to show sufficiently her overwhelming pity. But Fanny was difficult, wayward, still occasionally threatening suicide, impatient under Mabel's demonstrations, resenting everything that was done or said. Because she was so difficult it became Mabel's idea that Ted's death had unhinged her mind. Even Mabel admitted that Fanny might not have been to Ted all that a wife should be. She thought it was remorse as well as grief that was preying upon her. It never struck Mabel that Cosmo's inattention at this juncture had anything to do with her state.

It was Mabel's idea that Fanny should not remain on in the house, the house that had been a disaster from first to last. She was not fit to be left alone, and Mabel was continually exercised on her behalf. It seemed a godsend, almost a miracle, when Mrs. Margaret Lemon, calling one day to inquire after the young widow, met Mabel there and heard her views, and said hastily, perhaps without thought, that Fanny had better come to her for a few days. Fanny brightened up wonderfully at the suggestion. It seemed as if Mrs. Lemon's sympathy had been the one thing for which she was waiting: it revived her as rain revives a dying flower. Fanny had played at being the dying flower, but held up her head when Margaret rained that injudicious invitation on her, never expecting to be taken at her word, dismayed at the prospect before her, indeed. Fanny said joyfully, or as joyfully as she thought decorous, that she was sure it would do her good. She

was almost fulsome in her gratitude. Mabel undertook to do all the packing, to stay on and shut the house up for her, to stand between her and visitors. Mrs. Margaret Lemon, rather out of love with herself for her impulsiveness, withdrew to make the necessary arrangements for her guest, and Mabel took her self-imposed task seriously in hand.

The very next morning, in Amos's car, lent for the occasion, and brand new widow's weeds, Fanny and her three large trunks arrived in the Berkeley Street flat. If Cosmo saw her there afterwards, within an hour of her arrival, the family at least was not scandalised by the haste with which Fanny had summoned him. Fanny had been longing to try the effect of her black clothes and drugged pallor on his failing allegiance. Cosmo had refused to come to Grosvenor Street since Ted had been carried out from there. It was this that was responsible for Fanny's waywardness, and tendency to suicide. She had not known where to go so that she might summon him to her. Margaret Lemon's hasty invitation opened the way.

CHAPTER XXI

Tout passe, tout casse, tout lasse. Ted's death was already obscure and remote before Dennis met Lady Diana again. He had subordinated his own feelings, not without difficulty he had held them in leash. Both Mabel and Amos had need of him, and he had been truly compassionate and gentle to the one, all that a son might be to the other. He had done all and more than duty demanded. But now, saddened as they all were, something of the day's order was restored. Mabel went about the house trying to regain the threads of her lost activities. Amos was back in business, Dennis in his office.

And there, quite early in the afternoon, when he was expecting nothing, hoping for nothing, he heard that Lady Diana Wayne was in the Gallery, and before he had time to realise it, or for the swift flush that followed the news to fade from his forehead, they were facing each other; she was before him in the flesh, not altered, more alluring than even in his dreams.

He knew what she had come here to say. That he had taken a liberty; she had seen her bank book, knew what he had paid into it. It was this that sent the colour to his cheeks, the colour that retreating left him so pale. Now he did not know how he had dared to do it; that he had so dared made him nervous and afraid as he stood before her. What apology could he make, how persuade her that what he had done was justifiable, right; that friendship had its privileges . . .

But Diana had no intention in her mind of challenging him on this point. She could not even guess at his thoughts.

"Isn't that a Matsys in your window? I could not help coming in to ask."

"I'll have it taken out for you."

He was so relieved that he forgot how absurd it was to treat her as a customer, and to tell the man to get the picture for her to see. They actually stood before it a little while discussing its merits. Then lifting her eyes to him, compassionately, dropping her voice:

"I wanted to tell you how sorry I was for your trouble, Cosmo told me of it. I tried to write, but I could not find the words. I am so sorry for you. I know that is why you are looking pale."

"No, it is not that only. I have been thinking . . ." he was again nervous and uncertain in his speech.

"Of me?" she smiled.

"Yes."

"I am so glad. It seems such a long time ago since we met. I thought you had forgotten all about me."

"You could not think that?"

"And as if we had never talked of being friends."

"But you have let me be your friend. I am not ungrateful for that. . . ."

And then he was afraid he had said the wrong thing and hurried on:

"I cannot tell you how glad I am to see you. May I come to Curzon Street again one afternoon?"

"But you are so busy, aren't you?"

"Not too busy for that. I have a partner."

Dennis hardly knew what he was saying; nothing came to him but commonplaces.

Over and over again he said that it was good of her to come. In truth it had been a sudden impulse. She *was* passing the window, and it had been a long time since she had seen him. She knew nothing at all about that augmented banking account. She was amongst the many women who see their pass books annually, or even less often. But she was unused to deny herself her whims, and in his absence

Dennis Passiful had grown to be almost more than a whim. Cosmo's story about his wife had affected her and she had not been able to get it out of her mind. There were a dozen reasons why she should have stayed away for one that had urged her to come. But here she was, more attracted than ever, Dennis's very reception of her accentuating his attraction. She had thought, perhaps hoped, that it would have lessened in absence, that she would have been more completely mistress of herself. But instead he held her by his pallor, self-restraint, the obvious way her presence affected him.

"This is the first time I have seen you in your own surroundings. You spend hours and hours in this gallery, don't you?"

"Not so many. My business takes me out a good deal."

"You like your business? It doesn't bore you?"

"Not often. I like seeing beautiful things, buying them. I don't care for selling, except sometimes to a connoisseur. And then always there is a certain pleasure in knowing oneself an expert, justifying one's judgment."

"How I wish my life was as full as yours! I seem to have nothing to do. You have everything you want. You are really quite a happy man?"

"Am I? No, I don't think I am. I am always wanting something else, something different." He broke off abruptly.

He did not want to be disingenuous, and he remembered that what he had wanted most of all up to now was to keep up his batting average, and to win matches for the Club.

"I would like to hear about it, I think I too have never been quite satisfied! I am keeping you, you have work to do?" She looked about her a little uncertainly. She did not know what men did who had businesses. Everything was beautiful in the Gallery.

"I don't know how you can bear to part with such things," she said.

He wanted to ask her if there was anything she would like to have. He was idiotically anxious to keep her standing there, talking to him, idiotically afraid lest a customer should come in and see her there. But the place and time were inauspicious for sentiment.

"Are you walking?" he asked her, a stupid enough question since she had told him she had seen the Matsys in the window.

"Yes, the motor is meeting me in Piccadilly. I'm so restless, I was going for a long motor drive." And then a sudden idea struck her.

"Why don't you come with me?" It was audacious, it took her breath away, and his.

"I am sure that is why you are pale. You have been indoors too much, and grieving. It is such a beautiful afternoon, not like November at all. There is no air in here. Why is the air always stagnant about pictures? Wouldn't you like to come for a drive?"

She really meant it, then. Why should he not go? If she was restless, he had not been less so. There was nothing to detain him here.

"I shall hate to think of you in this stagnant air, pale, whilst I am filling my lungs." Once the idea had come to her it seemed to grow more possible, more desirable. Why should she drive alone? He still hesitated, and that spurred her over the last fence.

"It would really do you any amount of good. I should feel quite a philanthropist if I could persuade you to it."

How unlike she was to everyone else; bewildering. It was impossible he should go with her. And then it was impossible he should not. She had not forgotten him. . . . Occasionally in the past days he had wondered if she had forgotten him, felt sure of it sometimes. Ted's death and

the funeral were like a pall that hung between him and her. If it parted now and again, to show him glimpses of her, it closed around again quickly.

Before he realised the position, he was walking with her down Bond Street, actually walking with her in the broad daylight. He had not known she was so tall; he did not know what they were talking about; for himself he knew he was talking at random, about the shops, and shopping generally, about some prints in a window, hats in autumnal tints, labelled, "For the moors." In one window there were Japanese trees, in flat oriental dishes, their backing an array of upright screens, all gold and black. She told him of her own collection of Japanese trees. Now they were passing a flower shop. A basket of mauve orchids tied up with pink ribbon caught his eye, blue hydrangeas in a great green pot. And there was the motor waiting, the chauffeur touching his hat as if there was nothing strange or unusual in him, Dennis Passiful, handing her in, following her.

"Where shall we go?" she asked him.

He had no suggestion to make.

"The best way out of London is Boxhill. You never offered me a cup of tea in Bond Street. You shall give me one in Boxhill. We will talk of Meredith. We can never finish talking of Meredith; we started it the other day, you remember?"

"Or of his Diana!" he got that out, and she smiled her appreciation of his quickness.

It was all so wonderful, so incredible. There came the slow crawl through London, the horn going all the time; traffic, tram-lines and confusion, hardly a word between him and her. He was tired, unstrung; he had not known it. He had had so many things of which to think, he had had no time to think of himself. Now he knew that he had been through dark days, vaguely troubled nights. He could sit beside her now, their shoulders almost touching and rest.

The scents she used, of violets or lavender, soft scents the name of which he could not capture, enveloped him. He felt as one who had come out of storm into calm. Now he could drift or float, he need not think. It was a great gift, this friendship with which she had dowered him. It lifted his life to another plane, it would give him a whole new outlook.

They were out of London now, the sky quite blue, as in spring, and the car was going faster, rushing through space; the wind was in his face. This was intimacy, companionship; he need not speak, she would understand. But when they spoke, now and again, interjectionally, in tune with the wind, their words, their few words, were no longer halting nor lame, but came easily.

"This is simply splendid!"

"The motor goes better when it goes fast. I hope we shan't be fined."

"I wish this could go on for ever."

"But I want my tea so badly."

Later on, but now they were in the country, he exclaimed:

"It is wonderful to be with you like this."

"I feel as if we had run away."

"We have, from everyday duty and normal life."

"Cosmo says that with all of us the normal life is the abnormal."

"He speaks for himself."

"And for me."

"It is true that you are unlike anybody else."

"Am I? Are you glad of that?"

"I am intoxicated by it."

"And I must look as if I were. My hat is coming off."

He looked at her, the wind had caught her cheeks, and there was a glow in them, the glow had reached her eyes, where it danced. After that, elliptical phrases were new strides to intimacy, and eloquent silences needed no excuse. So they reached Boxhill.

CHAPTER XXII

At Boxhill, at the inn with the Meredithian tradition, Dennis ordered tea for her. Whilst they were waiting for it to be brought them, she told him the story, as Cosmo had told it her, of how there were assembled here, to do honour to Meredith on his seventieth birthday, all that was most notable in the world of letters: poets and essayists, brother novelists, the publishers who gave the works of these men to the world. They had gone in deputation to his house, the rare little house beyond the town, with the flamboyant garden, and then heard that he was ill, too ill to receive them. Back they had come here, nevertheless, for their celebration, had feasted, and drunk his health again and again, making speeches, extolling and exalting him whom they all called Master. Then, when the evening was falling, and the dusk had gathered, pæan after pæan having been sung in his praise, and all their heart attuned to the occasion; over the hill, and the garden, and through the French window, he strode, this gentle Colossus; his hair a little wild under his soft hat, and his fine face aglow. He had heard of their coming, risen from his bed of sickness, braved the distance and the hill, and now was amongst them, not Master but Comrade, full of talk, and the eloquence that comes from the heart. Their homage had touched him; in return, for a miraculous quarter of an hour, he gave them rare confidences, flashes of a brilliant wit, here a word, a sentence, revealing the depth of his human knowledge, there a phrase that was like a beacon of light in the darkness. He drank with them, before passing out as he came, leaving an ineffaceable memory. This was his last anni-

versary. Those who were privileged to be present have told the story in print more than once. But from Diana, Dennis heard it for the first time, picturing the old man's entry, and how the assembly had risen silently to their feet to greet him, scarce believing their eyes.

To sit at their tea afterwards, in that hillocky garden, hearing the late birds sing, was as the continuation of a poem. They talked of Meredith and his creations, of how well he had understood love. It was strange that whilst it was into friendship they were growing, love should have been the theme of all their talk. To that other Diana, Dennis now saw a hundred resemblances; and she disputed each one with him, saying how little he knew her. So they talked about themselves and each other, until the short afternoon drifted into evening. They took no heed of time; for what did it matter? It grew so late that the garden behind them was black, and in front the inn showed yellow lights.

"We are getting to know each other so much better."

"How strange we have only met now!"

That was the keynote of it; Diana knew the variations, but it was all new to Dennis. It was Diana, too, who came at length to realise how late it was.

"Do find out what time it is. We seem to have only been talking for half an hour, but all the light is gone. Do you hate motoring in the dark?"

She had risen, and he struck a match to look at his watch. Startled at what he saw there, he raised his eyes to break it to her, but meeting hers, was no longer afraid.

"It is nearly eight. You can't get home in time for dinner. Let me order you something here."

"But you?"

"It doesn't matter. I'll telephone or telegraph."

"Dine here?" she said, uncertainly. He urged it.

"Why not? *Do!* Then drive back by moonlight."

"You really mean it?"

Of course he meant it; he wanted to have this one meal together, he and she alone. It seemed almost too good to be true. But it came true, nevertheless. She hesitated for a long time, but quite suddenly his urging prevailed. It was "adventure" for her too. Never had she dined in this way, in England, alone with a man to whom she was not related. But they had become such good comrades. Just so Diana of the Crossways would have dined with Redworth, he said. And with the consideration of a Redworth, Dennis Passiful would treat her, that she knew. But she remembered the end of the story, and wondered whether he did. This reflection came to her whilst she was arranging her toilette, prior to the dinner to which she had suddenly agreed.

As soon as her uncertainty had yielded to his insistence, he had hastened to order everything the house could provide, he sent the chauffeur to his supper, made all his arrangements. He had not managed cricket teams for nothing. Yet he knew that he was excited, everything having become suddenly mysterious and wonderful, a great adventure to be happening to him, life expanding, the horizon widening. He had no time to think, he was just living in each moment, such moments! Nothing like this had ever happened to him before, his life had lain along such conventional lines. When once the idea had seized him, he had become eager about it, although all his arguments were couched in schoolboy phrases. "It would be so awfully jolly, such a spree!"

It really seemed as if a half holiday was being turned into a whole holiday; there were to be long hours more of pleasure.

When she came down to him again it seemed more unreal than ever. She had taken off her hat; the afternoon dress that her heavy coat had concealed was cloth, and sheath-like to her figure, her hands were ungloved. His eyes dwelt upon her, how lovely she looked; his pulses were

suddenly uneven, she went to his head like wine. It was she who restored his calm to him as she said:

"I'm simply ravenous! What have you ordered?"

He answered seriously that he was afraid they were not going to have a very good meal.

"What a pity! But perhaps you are taking too pessimistic a view."

The view he was taking was of her, and she moved away from the new ardour of his eyes, standing now by the window. "Anyhow, tell them to hurry," she said with her back turned toward him. "We must not make it *too* late, must we?"

"I'll ring," he answered soberly.

The small private room in which they found themselves looked on to the garden. She fell to talk of Meredith again whilst they were waiting, and visioned him walking down the hill. Dennis came over to her where she stood; the window was open; perhaps that was why she shivered, and soon moved away.

At first the dinner was not gay; an uneasiness or constraint fell upon them when they had taken their places at the table, and the soup was brought in. Perhaps it was the presence of the waiter.

"This soup is quite good."

"I am very glad; of course, they've had only a short notice."

"What else is coming?"

"Soles, lamb, an apple pie. It was the best they could do in the time."

He was apologetic, although there seemed no cause in the menu as recited. It was so commonplace, he thought, yet nothing was commonplace that was happening. There were long waits between the courses, and each time the waiter returned he clattered with the dishes outside, knocking before he entered. She ate daintily, and all at once his

own appetite failed, although the fish was fresh, the lamb tender, and the potatoes flaky and soft; there was a salad.

"You said you were hungry?" He noticed she was only toying with the food, making a pretence to eat it.

"I thought I was. I wonder why we are neither of us eating. It is quite as late as we usually dine." But she did not really wonder; a certain shyness was upon her, very strange and unknown to her. It seemed as if he never took his eyes from her face.

"Perhaps it is because you are looking at me," she said, laughing a little unevenly. "I am not used to being looked at when I eat."

"Aren't you?" he answered simply. "I should have thought you were." Then she laughed more naturally, and tasted her wine.

"Château Gilbey?" she asked, making a wry face. He was concerned about that. He told her he had observed that night he dined in Curzon Street she had not drunk champagne, but claret. Therefore he had ordered the best Burgundy the house afforded.

"You noticed that?" she said, wonderingly. Yet ceased to wonder when he said, "Of course." She tasted the wine again, and some gladness or content in her eyes contracted the wryness of her mouth.

"Don't go on drinking that. In the champagne they'll have vintage wines, something about which there will be no doubt."

He rose from his chair to recall the incurious waiter, and after deliberation and some help from her, they decided upon Pomeroy '94. He was conscious of the nearness of her hair when she looked over the wine list with him.

"I don't dislike champagne. I like it, only that evening," she remembered too, "I felt I wanted no wine at all. I was a little excited." She added, disingenuously, "There were so many Cabinet Ministers present!"

But she stole a glance at him that said, 'and it was not only the Cabinet Ministers.' The wine when it came loosened both their tongues. She began to talk more gaily than she had in the garden, giving him sketches of the people he had met at their house; a little malicious, but what is humour without malice? She spoke of the ministers as the Walrus and the Carpenter. And met his objection that the Cymric Samson had not much of the walrus about him by trying other zoological analogies. They ranged between cages, from ferret to weasel, but found nothing completely analogous. His eyes were so bright; in a few years he would have a red nose. There is no animal with bright eyes and a red nose. It did not matter what they said. After the champagne had exhilarated them, and they had recovered from the strangeness of the meal together, it was nothing but nonsense they talked, like the foam on the champagne. And if Dennis kept up with her with difficulty or laboured after her, it was not surprising, for never had he known a woman like this; she bewildered him by the lightness of her wit, no less than by her beauty. Never had he sat at such a feast. The communal meals at Hamilton Terrace, the observations about the herrings, the story of the soles, were a hundred years ago. There was not a serious moment after the champagne had been quaffed; but some sense, or undercurrent, of embarrassment may well have lingered.

"Shall we ever do this again?" she asked, lightly, when at length it was evident that a move must be made, when all the wine had been drunk, with the liqueurs and coffee that followed, and she had discovered that her cigarette case was empty.

"I hope so."

That was banal. She ran upstairs to put on her hat, bringing down her cloak for him to help her into it. She was very near him as he wound the cloak round her. It

was in the hall, and the hall was badly lit, the throbbing of the motor as the man busied himself with the lamps made it impossible for her to hear the quick beating of his heart. Yet she might have known of it, for her eyes were downcast, her voice muffled.

"How awkward you are about it! Don't trouble. I'll put it on myself."

Dennis was not an awkward man, dexterous rather, and with easy movements. But now he knew that his fingers had fumbled, and he made no reply to the accusation. He handed her in in silence, in silence he took his place beside her. They had been driving for five minutes before either of them broke it.

"What a wonderful night!" This was simultaneous. And they both laughed, breaking up the silence.

They were travelling comparatively slowly, the chauffeur cautious amid the evening shadows. The sky was quite dark, black clouds threatening rain, grey clouds like mist beneath them, a pale moon floating serene, chill in the air. Not a beautiful night, no stars, and the gloom too dim for mystery. Yet they found it beautiful, and it was they that made it so.

"You wondered if we should ever meet again like this." It was Dennis who started the talking. "There is no reason why we should not, is there?" She took a moment before she answered, then the answer that came was a little hesitating.

"I suppose not." But she was thinking about his wife, of all that stood between them. A little laugh escaped her, but it was quite mirthless.

"I don't know what Dolly would say about it."

"I thought we had agreed Lord Haverford was not to be considered, that he was quite beside the question."

Dennis felt his face flushing, the flush spreading over him. But it was very dark, they were not yet come to the region

of tram-lines and people; his voice stumbled, yet hurried on.

"I can't bear to think of you together; after this."

"We have been happy, haven't we?"

"It has all been wonderful!"

Involuntarily his hand sought hers, and found it. . . . It was still in his when the pace changed. They had come all at once from the country into the town. Now before them were yellow street lamps and great cars full of people. The connecting wires overhead emitted little sparks of light, and from either side the street shop girls, clerks, boys on bicycles, and girls behind perambulators, the proletariat at leisure, swarmed into the roadway. Perhaps he had been holding her hand unconsciously. A girl on the pavement, under a street lamp, with a man's arm about her waist, reminded him, and he released it abruptly. He knew her fragrance, and the slenderness beneath her enveloping cloak. But he would not think of either, ashamed of the emotions that were all new to him.

"It isn't so late after all." He hurried into talk, so that he should not feel.

"Not more than ten, I should think."

"Will your father be at home, expecting you?"

"He was to have been at the House. This autumn session is going to be eventful, changes in the Cabinet are imminent." She followed his lead easily, but still warm on her hand she felt the pressure of his; the car was too small for her to escape from the touch of his shoulder.

"He generally goes to his Club, and stops there late."

"You would have been alone?"

"Yes. I should have been alone."

He drew closer to her, would have taken her hand again, it was an instinctive movement that his reason prevented.

"I hate to think of you being lonely."

"You can never think of me as being anything else."

This was almost passionate and set him aquiver. Another street lamp showed them each other's eyes.

"I believe I like to think of you lonely when I am not with you."

Was it he who had said that? *He*, Dennis Passiful? The words came and went again, and now they seemed to have no meaning.

CHAPTER XXIII

SOMETHING went wrong with a gear or a sparking plug, there was a shortage of lubricating oil or petrol. Neither of them were learned in such matters, but they became aware that the car was going jerkily, and unevenly, back-firing and noisy. They were off the tram-lines, yet more than once it seemed as if they would never reach Curzon Street in the motor, but would have to get out, or take a cab. It was the chauffeur who always reassured them.

"She's picking up, my lady," was one of the phrases that struck Dennis as inadequate, it told them so little. He scented danger, and his nerves played him false. She knew he was nervous, and rallied him gaily, suggesting he should get out. He took her rallying seriously, and scouted the idea that he should let her go home alone, that she was taking him out of his way, that she could drop him in Knightsbridge or Piccadilly. In truth she did not press it. The car lumbered on, and engrossed them.

It was past eleven when they found themselves at Curzon Street. There she handed him her latchkey, telling him it was unnecessary to ring.

The big square hall was lighted from the fire that smouldered on the hearth, the glow fell on the tapestries of the staircase, on a marble bust by Houdin, on the great clock with the *lapis lazuli* dome; it was but a dim light. He had an intense desire to pass into the warmth and beauty with her. It seemed impossible. Yet when she said:

"Shut the door quietly," he found himself inside.

She had suggested dropping him in Knightsbridge, in Piccadilly. Now that he was here, she did not seem to remember the lateness of the hour.

"Go into the drawing-room. Wait for me there."

The long French windows were open and the beautiful mysterious room was full of the scented warmth from the winter garden. Here, too, there was only the firelight to reveal or suggest the pictures in their tarnished frames, the cabinets and *encoignures*, the big sofa heaped with cushions; tables, like altars, laden with flowers; Dresden and Chelsea in crinoline or groups. His sub-consciousness revelled in it all, his consciousness was full only of her.

She came to him very soon; sooner than he had thought possible she was back in the room. She had changed her dress, loosened her hair, was altogether different, and yet the same. He had a strange new sense of intimacy with her.

"Did you mind waiting? I hate being in the same dress so many hours. My maid is out apparently, or asleep. This was all I could find."

'This' was a garment softly green, revealing her slenderness, Greek in the way it was folded beneath her bosom, falling in long lines to the feet; Greek, too, was the ornament upon it, key-patterned in dull gold. On her throat were two little rows of pearls; he saw them rising and falling, not quite regularly. She had, perhaps, dressed too quickly; there was a little pulse moving irregularly in her throat, it fascinated his eyes.

"I feel ever so much more comfortable. If you want anything to drink, you'll find it in the room beyond; through the curtains. Won't you turn up the lights?"

"I don't want to turn up the lights."

Again the words surprised him; the voice was his voice, although that, too, sounded strange, and a little unsteady. The words had little meaning, he explained them:

"The dust from the motor got into my eyes. This half light is so jolly."

"Jolly" was absurd, a school-boy word, and he did not feel in the least like a school-boy. Like a man, rather, feeling his manhood for the first time, holding on to himself with difficulty, not quite understanding.

"Now you speak of it, I believe my eyes are strained too, they feel quite hot." She put her hands up to them, her delicate pale hands.

"Why don't you sit down? You are making me nervous; you look like a wraith, standing up there so solemnly. You *are* solemn, are you not? What are you thinking about?"

All at once she knew she was playing with fire, women know these things instinctively; there was not a shadow of excuse for her, unless that Joseph she sensed in him before, and again now, was an excuse. She had lifted her delicate hands to her eyes, now she clasped them behind her head; there were no sleeves to the dress, and he saw the slender rounded arms, on her white neck the pearls looked grey; the pulse in her neck was still beating. She saw his eyes change, and fasten on her. She began to talk quickly, but softly; she liked the change in his eyes, wanted them to shine yet more, she liked the unsteadiness of his voice.

"What a strange thing we did, you and I! To-morrow it will seem as if it never happened. Tea in the garden, and the hours of talk, then the stuffy little room, and the good dinner. How long have we known each other? A month, counted by weeks. But from the first we knew we were going to be friends, didn't we? That first night at the theatre, when you only looked at me; the second when you sat in the stall beside me . . . how quickly it all happened! I have never had a man friend before. I've had lovers, of course . . ."

Then she unclasped her hands from behind her head,

leaned a little forward, retrospection in her eyes. He repeated, under his breath, standing there quite still:

"Lovers?"

He repeated it dully, or stupidly, as one without the full sense or meaning of the word. "Lovers! you have had lovers?"

"Is it so surprising?" and glancing up at him from under her long lashes she added: "All men are not like you."

There was a gleam of amusement in her eyes, and she was not in the least afraid, although her heart was beating fast, and the little pulse betrayed it. The red curve of her mouth was vibrant.

"I had heard there were men like you, not caring for women, not in that way."

"What way? What do you mean?"

He had moved and was standing before her.

"If you mean that I don't want to kiss you, you are wrong!"

His eyes were so bright that hers caught fire from them, but now they were downcast, so that he should not see.

"I never wanted anything so much in my life!"

"It is getting very late." Her voice was not quite steady, for a moment she almost feared what she had encouraged.

By this time the fire had sunk to a red heap of ashes, and in the silence of the house there was no one but themselves.

Yet if the thin red curve of her sweet lips had not quivered, if he had not seen her eyes on fire before they had been downcast, if the dress had been different, or she . . . he did not know afterwards from where his courage had come.

Before he knew why or how it came about, he was kissing her lips, her hair, her eyes. And oh, the sweetness of her, the yielding of her, and the relief in crushing her close and ever closer. The fragrance and the slenderness roused a hunger in him, a thirst. It was as if her lips could slake

it, and he fastened on them. And never had lips made such response. Perhaps it was that response, so startling, or the effect of long habit, or some sudden fear . . .

Certain it was that against the rising tide of his passion, conscience, all at once and effectively, threw up an impregnable barrier. The next moment he had released her, and was gazing startled, into startled eyes. Then hers were hidden against the sofa pillows, and it was only half a white shoulder he could see.

"You will never forgive me?"

Even that he got out stumblingly and with difficulty. But what she could not do, but yet must, threw him on his knees. He had misunderstood the response. He had a passionate reverence for her, and as he kneeled he could have kissed her feet. He would not harm her by a thought, he knew he had misunderstood; she was immaculate, pure, virginal, wonderful. He wanted to tell her all this, but the words came to his throat and died in it. He could only on his knees stammer out excuses, a prayer for forgiveness. He had not meant to shock, frighten, hurt her; he did not know what had come over him, such a thing had never happened before, could never happen again. She *must*, she should forgive him. The moment of his daring was over, and he had dared so little. He poured out his incoherent torrent of self-reproaches, and presently, muffled from the sofa cushions, he heard her say that they had been very foolish.

"Foolish!" the word sobered and helped him. Foolish! Yes; that was all. His nerves reacted, and brought him to his feet.

Now she sat up; he did not try to see her eyes.

"Turn on the light; it is time for you to go, it is very late."

"But I may come again? You won't change to me?" His nerves had reacted, but he was still unstrung.

"Yes. No." She spoke hurriedly, uncertainly. She heard something more than his words, or less.

"It is my father," she said. "Listen!" He thought it was fear he detected in her.

"Your father?" The sound of the house door closing reverberated through the house.

"He will be surprised . . . finding you here."

Dennis, unused to adventure, had no quick expedient. He had still to fight for his self-possession, but before the echo of that closed street door had died away, it seemed as if Diana's had never been in jeopardy. After that first startled exclamation she had sunk back in the corner of the sofa, saying hurriedly again to Dennis.

"Turn on the light!"

Fortunately he found a switch.

"It is possible he will go straight upstairs," was her next observation, and now both of them were listening. But Lord Loughborough had seen a man's coat in the hall, he thought he might find Haverford with Diana. He opened the door of the drawing-room.

"Is that you, father? How late you are! I made Mr. Passiful remain."

She greeted him as if it were nothing unusual to find her at midnight with a dead fire, and dim lights, sitting with a young man, with that particular young man. And Lord Loughborough behaved more in accord with his traditions than his politics. His good manners held, his breeding told; he accepted the situation as if he were not completely taken aback and even startled by it.

"It was very good of you to wait up for me, my dear; I am not often as late as this, but I was detained, important affairs . . . Where is Baines? Why have you so little light?"

He turned on all the other switches as he spoke; now the room was flooded and he could see both their faces. There

was nothing expressive in Diana's, even her colour had answered to the call of the occasion. But Dennis was very pale, not equal to either of them in his acting.

"We went a long motor ride together, to see a picture. We have not long been back."

"A picture! Where was that?"

"Perhaps it was an impression, rather than a picture."

Dennis marvelled at her coolness. As she had expected, her father rose at the word impression, his whole gorge revolted at the new school, and he went off on the wrong scent, perhaps not unwittingly. He began to inveigh against Manet and Monet, and the French modernists generally, to Dennis's bewilderment; only pulling himself up abruptly when Diana put in a word in favour, at least, of post-impressionism. She thought the time had come for a diversion now that the incongruity of Dennis's presence had become obscured. Lord Loughborough had no illusion, as Diana had, did not see six feet of magnificent figure, and the head of Antinous. He only saw the Bond Street Gallery, and a man to whom he sometimes gave commissions. His words reflected this attitude of mind.

"I am astonished you deal at all in such things; daubs, sir, daubs . . ."

"I am afraid I must be going."

Diana had within her a momentary bubblement of laughter, then a quick revulsion. Her father's natural stupidity, Dennis's defencelessness, made her mistress of the situation.

"Must you go? But never mind now, since my father has returned. And you will decide against purchasing the masterpiece we saw, you will be guided by my father's views, I am sure, won't you?" Her eyes were gay as she held out a farewell hand to him. Turning to her father, she went on:

"The motor broke down on the way home, that is why we were so late. Mr. Passiful was kind enough to stay until

you or Cosmo returned; it was something of a shock to my nerves."

"Very kind, I am sure," Lord Loughborough said, more stiffly, recalled to the position by the explanation of it: "I suppose you are going to walk? It is quite a pleasant night."

Dennis found himself in the street, hardly knowing how he had got there. He felt chilled, but could not attribute it to anything that had occurred. Lord Loughborough had been very kind, not at all surprised apparently to see him there, which he might so well have resented. And in bidding him good-bye Diana had murmured: "Come in to-morrow afternoon." There was no reason he should have felt chilled.

CHAPTER XXIV

LORD LOUGHBOROUGH'S amiability lasted until the door was shut upon Dennis. Then he unmasked the battery of his sarcasm on Diana's level head. It would be really subversive of the depleted dignity of the Upper House to report exactly what he said. The gist of it was that his daughter was disgracing his house by entertaining every Tom, Dick, and Harry whom she met, and that she seemed not to know the meaning of class distinction. He entirely forgot his Liberalism when it had to be practised, and not only used to secure the Labour votes. That Dennis Passiful was a tradesman, a Bond Street shopkeeper, was the crux of the attack. Several times he said he would not have his house used for her to entertain such people.

Silence was her entrenchment, and she kept to it, smiling sometimes quietly, which naturally enraged him further; he saw that his words failed to find their mark. As a matter of fact Dennis himself had made his own record; whatever variety of meaning might be attached to the word gentleman, in her eyes, at least, he had established once and for ever his claim to use it.

In the end, pettishly, for he was a pettish person, Lord Loughborough asked her what she thought Haverford would say to her proceedings.

"What does it matter?" was the indifferent response. She was startled by the query, nevertheless, although not for the reason her father might have anticipated. He said "pish" and "tush," or sounds to that effect, representing the low-water mark of his conversational equipment; then he tried to put the expiring fire together with some

awkwardness. After which he said again that it was very late, and that they ought all to be in bed. Quite inconsequently he "supposed that Cosmo was not yet in," and animadverted upon the ways of his family generally.

Meanwhile Diana had been thinking, and as she had been thinking too quickly, she spoke too impulsively. What did it matter what Dolly thought of anything she might do or say? Was there really any necessity for her to marry him; he was personally so distasteful . . . and at that thought she flushed involuntarily, remembering Dennis Passiful's personality, and her momentary intimacy with it. If it were only on account of her debts, or her tendency to extravagance that she was marrying Dolly, she knew that need no longer trouble her.

Her thoughts may have travelled farther than this, considerably farther; but only nebulously, into some dim ether where it is indecorous to follow her. She rose abruptly:

"I daresay you are right, Father. Dolly *will* probably object to my friendship with Mr. Passiful. I don't intend to give it up, but I should be very glad if *he* gives me up. I don't know why I ever consented to marry him. He is such a miserable little worm; you know it as well as I. And he will do nothing for Mervyn, or Van. It isn't as if he were so extraordinarily rich, either. Money in land is hardly money at all; it is only an expense as long as your friends remain in power."

"You talk of what you don't understand."

"What? Not understand Dolly?"

He answered, testily, "You know I was not alluding to your cousin."

"No? Well, I was."

She was tired, and a little insolent, whilst her father was startled, and a little alarmed. He said he never had understood his children, and he supposed he never should.

Diana, under her breath, admitted he was quite right, he never would. But Lord Loughborough could not contemplate the abandonment of the Haverford alliance, and thinking he had been, perhaps, injudicious, he was now all for conciliation.

"The best thing you can do, that your brothers and all of us can do, is to hurry matters on. I don't know what either of you are waiting for. You have known each other all your lives."

"That is just the reason. I suppose I have a glimmer of sense left, or feeling. Why should I be hurried into marriage with a fool and a sot, because Mervyn has borrowed of him and Vansittart hopes to? I have myself to think of, my own personal dignity. Dolly outrages it, and that is more than Mr. Passiful would ever do."

She flushed again when she said his name, she was conscious of a pride in him.

"Don't talk to me of Mr. Passiful. What has Mr. Passiful to do with us? You will be talking of your chauffeur next. I don't know what we are all coming to." She was already at the door when she flung at him, for she was smarting and unreasonable:

"If Mr. Passiful were a free man, if he became a free man to-morrow, and more impossible things have happened, I should do more than talk about him. He is rich, quite as rich as Dolly, and without half a dozen big places to keep up. What is the good of Thorpe to me, or Kiltoe Castle, or Dunbar? If I live in any of them, Dolly will live there too. How would you like to live with Dolly? As for position, there is a time coming, not only in politics, but in daily life, when character will count above position or power of money. When that time comes, Dennis Passiful will stand far above Dolly; he will stand above you."

To say Lord Loughborough was astounded at the outburst, is to put it very mildly. Balaam when his ass spoke

could have been conscious of no greater phenomenon. It was not only that she defended the picture-dealer, condemned Dolly, who for so many years they had all accepted at his surface value, his surface value being his rent roll; it was that *his* daughter, that Diana, could talk of character, principle, those old Tory virtues that his party had so long discarded, without which they were getting on so admirably, all their placemen secure in their places, and even those "Labour fellows" silenced with their £400 a year.

"You are talking rubbish, pure rubbish. You know you are, just to anger me. You are all alike . . ."

There came a fusillade of words between them now, undignified, unworthy to be chronicled. Under cover of it, however, Diana made her escape. She had said all that she had to say, much more than she intended. Whatever her brothers and herself may have thought of her father's conduct in relation to their country's affairs, they had all been careful not to put it into words, except occasionally to each other. She knew that she had been false to the family traditions.

He let her escape, he was entirely disturbed by the discussion, more so than by the event that had led up to it. His egotism had been attacked, she had actually found fault with his conduct. It was inconceivable. She left him on the eve of becoming plaintive; soon he would be talking of "all he had done for his children." Perceiving the symptoms, she escaped. What he had done for them was little more than what they had compelled him. There had never been any generosity in his giving.

But having reached the solitude of her own room, not undisturbed by what had taken place and her own injudicious outburst, her thoughts followed obstinately the line of the argument she had used. Haverford *was* a fool and a sot; there was not one point except his lineage in which Dennis Passiful was not his superior. What Lord Lough-

borough professed, but disbelieved, had become a vital truth to Diana.

Diana's bedroom was on the half landing, her bath-room led out from it. They had been recently modernised; now the marble bath, the tiled walls and floor, the shower and the spray were the last word in luxury. The bedroom, too, had been refurnished for her on her return from Egypt. She had felt the necessity of making her father's house into a home; and these were her mother's rooms that had been given up to her. Some day she would marry Dolly; his constancy, her father's and Cosmo's urging, made it seem inevitable just then, when her widowhood, and certain occurrences that succeeded it, found her a little frightened at her freedom, and capacity for misusing it. She was not oblivious of the comfort she enjoyed here; there had always been a sensuousness about her to which comfort appealed. India, Egypt, and the innate asceticism of her husband had starved it, but now it was being well fed. The pink profusion of upholstery and drapery, canopying the bed, clouding the windows; the satinwood of low wardrobes and wide toilet-table, the gold mirrors and brushes, and cut-glass bottles; the lawn and lace of the garments that hung ready for the night, all these soothed her mood, insensibly influencing her train of thought.

She undressed slowly. She was beautiful; there was no denying it, young, and with the desire of life. From the top of her Greek head to the instep of her small foot there was not a line nor a curve that failed to give her pleasure as they were reflected from the mirror. She was slender, statue pale; through the fineness of the investing garments she saw nothing that she would have had altered. And was she, such as she was, to give herself to Haverford? She recalled him, his narrow head and the baldness of it, his retreating chin, loose mouth, weak hands; she resented the image, thrust it away. Instead there came Dennis Passi-

ful's fine and powerful proportions, the shoulder against which her head had leaned. She had seen the abandonment of passion, but never its restraint, had had men's homage but never their reverence. She was only seven-and-twenty. Was she to go all her life without knowing more than selfish love, without tenderness and marital love, without response? From this man she could have all, everything. She knew it, instinctively, but with an absolute sureness of knowledge that thrilled her as she felt it. And she? She could give him . . . Like a flood it poured over her, the things she could give him. And her nature was generous, she rejoiced in the gifts she could give to a lover; she was wholly feminine, and generous! Lover, or husband! He might be free, and at that her imagination leapt! For if what Cosmo said was true, if Dennis had an unfaithful wife, and would one day be free, neither her father nor brothers, Haverford nor Dennis himself, need deter her from following her inclinations. That 'Dennis himself' was an afterthought: he thought so highly of her, he would not let her stoop. But would it be stooping? that was the question. A question of which she hardly doubted the answer, so much had he affected her, so far in love with him had she fallen.

They met the next day; that was inevitable. He had to hear what her father had said to her, and be sure that she had forgiven him because he had kissed her. It seemed a little incredible that he had kissed her and felt the response of her lips. He was filled with doubts, and less happy than he had ever been in his life. More excited, however, and intensely alive.

After he had seen Diana; the inevitable scene between them interrupted by the Duchess and Irene; he went to Tiffany's, and bought Mabel a black ribbon bow, outlined in diamonds. He resented the dull jet brooch that was part of her sable tribute to Ted's memory. When he got

home, earlier than usual, and found her crying, he told her he could not bear to see her looking so unhappy. His kindness and thoughtfulness overwhelmed her, her gratitude choked in her throat, bringing on more tears that trickled again and again through a lugubrious dinner.

"I know I'm very selfish. I can't help thinking of poor Ted, and father. Father is so unlike himself, I'm sure he is unhappier than any of us know. He does not even care for the theatre now; he says it has brought him ill luck. Mr. Merritt does all he can to rouse him, Fanny has been up too. How kind of you to buy me such a beautiful mourning brooch!"

She wept into the tepid soup, and at intervals until the cornucopia was on the table.

Although she looked so dull in her garments of woe, and moved about the house as if she were still at Ted's funeral, he was conscious in the next few days of an increase of tenderness for his wife, and a great desire for her happiness. He had the same desire for Diana's. As for his own, in these days he hardly knew which way it lay. He had excited nights, and many restless hours. His panacea failed him. Although he played squash racquets every morning at Lord's, taking as much exercise as was possible, he was ever conscious of his body, and concerned as to his condition. Turkish baths proved another abortive experiment.

Some time or another, in every day, he was seeing Lady Diana. Her talk stimulated, her beauty inflamed him; his blood had the fever of spring, running in his veins like sap in the tree, unevenly, in sudden gushes. It seemed as if she was beginning to depend on him, there was so much he could do for her. Her affairs wanted putting in order. It was her growing dependence that moved him to such desperate tenderness. So he thought, realising only now and then that it was her downy skin or the black abundance of her hair, the way she moved in her slenderness, or the witch-

ery of her eyes, now laughing and now soft, of her red lips, the clinging abandonment of which he had once tasted.

It was difficult to interest himself in business, although it was good under the circumstances to feel that the firm was making money, always more money. Mr. Dolland was persistent in pursuing treasure.

Diana had had no further discussion with her father. Lord Loughborough concluded that his words, the moral attitude he had adopted, had taken due effect.

One of Lord Haverford's places was a mere shooting-box. Here, in these November days, he went with his prospective father-in-law, in pursuit of late grouse and young pheasant. Lord Loughborough was still a useful gun, and Denham poor in covert. Practically, therefore, for Cosmo was little at home, Diana had the Curzon Street house to herself, could deny herself to callers without comment, receive whom she pleased. She used her freedom to the uttermost limit, and afternoon after afternoon Dennis sat with her in that beautiful drawing-room, talking poetry or prose, art or architecture. All the time they were revealing to each other mutual tastes and emotions. There were rare moments when those mutual tastes and emotions found some short physical vent, when he would kiss her hands, or once again her lips; he was often on the brink of discovery that friendship meant love, and love, friendship. But the climax of neither was reached.

It pulsed about them, that climax, was always a danger, but, to Diana, certainly an exhilarating possibility. It was as if they were climbing a mountain for a view. Already they saw wonders of sunset and sky, but to the full glory they had not yet come. Dennis had no thought of what was beyond the summit of the mountain, but the excitement of the climb was telling on him. Diana was really better informed, although never before had she attempted to climb such a high peak as this one.

There came an evening when, although he had no vision of the summit of the mountain, he no longer doubted that there was a summit.

Diana sat alone in her own boudoir after dinner. Lord Loughborough was still away, Cosmo out; there was no chance of disturbance. She was like a girl with her first love, all doubt and fluctuation of emotion, but a woman, glowing with expectancy and excitement in her knowledge of what love meant, and the joys of it.

Dennis had never seen her in this room, among her own familiar treasures and household gods. She wanted him to see them, and to commend her taste, to know her here, where she had made her home. Diana's boudoir was not crowded, like the drawing-room, it lacked the tapestries of the dining-room, the notable carved wood and painted Kitcats of the library. The curtains were drawn, they were velvet curtains, hanging in rich folds, concealing the windows. The recessed fireplace had the big sofa in front of it, and all the chairs were low and luxurious, many cushioned. On the grey walls were eighteenth-century stipple engravings in colour, a set of the "Cries of London," another of the "Months," "Laetitia" as she traversed the road to ruin, "Lady Rushout" with her daughter; "Mrs. Abingdon," the "St. James's Park" and its companion; a rich collection, hung low. A dwarf bookcase, Chippendale, not unlike the one that made the feature of his own study, ran round two sides of the room, and this was crowded with Staffordshire pottery, quaint cottage, quainter figures, shepherds and their flocks, milkmen and maids with pails, tithe pieces, deer and other animals. There were no flowers in this room, and no signs of womanly needlework or occupation, but many books, and, on half a dozen stands, isolated, low and independent, were rare small Japanese trees, hundreds of years old, in dark Nankeen pots or blue pie-shaped dishes on infinitesimal feet. There were only

wall lights in the room, half of them were unlit and all were shaded. From a wrought iron brazier in the corner an oriental pastille distilled a subtle scent.

Hitherto Dennis had seen her in black or white, in simple clothes. To-night the red of the soft satin that clung to her slenderness was covered by some material, light as gossamer, purple in colour, embroidered heavily with gold. It had the excuse of looseness to call itself tea-gown, but her shoulders and arms were undraped. The shaded lamps, the fire, seemed to concentrate their light upon her, and against it her black hair, her white skin, her radiant eyes, shone marvellously. The vision of her standing in those clinging draperies to meet him went suddenly to his head. Perhaps he, with his ardent eyes, visible self-restraint, a little pale, went to hers. Anyway, without a doubt, a pause, a wonderment how they should greet each other, the greeting had come to pass. If his lips at first were timid, hers at least were responsive.

When they were seated, side by side on the sofa, neither of them were in doubt that they had an overwhelming pleasure in being thus together. Diana had not thought it possible she could be feeling as she was feeling at this minute, so absorbed and content, so expectant and yet so satisfied. Dennis did not stay to analyse his feelings; he only knew how excited he was; his pulses throbbing, his heart beating fast.

Then, all at once; it does not matter how it came about; turn of head or neck, a movement or a stillness, eyes bright or soft; but he was suddenly moved beyond his strength, and before he was aware found himself with his arms about her, lying close, mouth to mouth, hot, and a little reckless. He kissed and kissed again, she not rebuking. She was so in love with him by this time, that she could not even feign resistance, but lay in his arms, not supine, yielding rather, and even more than he asked, so that he pressed his advan-

tage, adoring her; and if he recollected that the body was a temple, he forgot, almost, that it was a temple hallowed.

When they recalled themselves, it was to silence, silence that lasted a long time.

And again it was he to whom reaction came.

"What are we to do? I never dreamed of this. Diana!"

She nestled against him again, woman-warm with him, enthralled. She had long known they loved each other. She had known, too, of his slowness in coming to the truth, rejoicing in it, for it proved he had loved no other woman in this way. Many days and nights she had been living in sight of this goal, giving play to her imagination. Once he realised at what a pace this love would bear him and to what goal, she never doubted of the end. Diana was hardly Diana with such an uncomprehending lover. But to-night she was all woman, and in her impatience to triumph over his scruples, found herself without any.

"I did not know," he said again. And at that she laughed a little low crooning laugh, and nestled in his arms.

The very retreat of him, of which she was even now subconscious, and that she had felt in him always, made her the more reckless.

"Isn't it wonderful?" she whispered.

"Wonderful," he repeated, holding her fast, doubting nevertheless, solacing himself with "what other fellows did," bewildered, almost overcome.

Yet for all that had come, or might come to him, intrinsically, Dennis Passiful could not alter. "She did not know to what she was tempting him," so he reasoned; he had to save her from herself and him. If he had the recklessness of the hour and his rising passion, he had also reverence for her, the amazing reverence of his ignorance. In the one breath he murmured, "Darling," and in the next promised she should never hear it from him again.

"Darling! darling! My God! I never thought it possible I could love like this. I wouldn't hurt you, I wouldn't wrong you . . ."

And he released her, when she wished that he would hold her more closely.

In the chill of this she felt what it was in him she had to fight; how impossible it was to fight it. He was *preux chevalier*, Bayard, Lancelot, "the Immaculate Exception," everything that Cosmo had called him. She felt she hated him, never wanted to see him again. Yet all her senses were alert for him and she knew she had never cared for any other man, and never could again. There was no other man in the world for her but this one, against whose armour her weapons had broken.

"If I were only free!" That was what he said next. And all at once she remembered, not what he would have her forget, for that was unforgettable; but what Cosmo had told her of his married life, of his wife, and her lover. It was impossible for her to look at him, and because her face was averted, it was difficult for him to hear what she was saying.

"But you don't really wish you were free?"

"My God!" Asseveration after that would have been weak.

"But you could be free, you could . . ." This was whispered, he could hardly hear it.

He could take the freedom of the temple; that is what she meant. He felt the flush and flood of his manhood drifting back uncertainly on the ebb tide of his reverence for her.

"Darling!" Again he sought her lips, but this time she evaded him, with head still averted and the voice that was almost inaudible.

"It is not as if you and your wife got on together. Your wife does not need you," and she added, so low that the

words were as if they could never have fallen from her, "*as I do.*"

He tightened his arms about her, saying, "Darling!" and "Darling!" and "If I only dared!" ignorant of where she was leading him.

It was long before love talk became conversation, and it was then, on the threshold of an understanding, they paused, and misunderstood, each seeing the other through the magnifying and diminishing glasses of their different temperaments, taking toll as they stood of love's bounty, never doubting it was inexhaustible. She made him free of her lips and arms. He forgot his marriage vows, but ever remembered them in the forgetting: he was really intoxicated with her, and to keep his senses alert was her way of telling him that she forgave it.

When at length he got up from the sofa, and began to walk about the room, saying incoherently that there had never been in the history of the world so adorable a woman, and even less clearly that he was ashamed, and that he hoped she did not care for him, would never have to bear what he was now bearing, they were both past reason.

"I think there is a way." This was Diana speaking.

Dennis was flushed, and every pulse in his body was still throbbing. She would sit through all love's feast with him, a feast of which he hardly knew more than the name. He knew this, she had made him know it. But it was her innocence that offered it, her ignorance, and he dared not take advantage of either. Yet the very folly and madness of it, and her abandonment, endeared her, and if it came to him, as well it might, that he was playing Joseph, he had no pride in his part, shame rather, and the call of his manhood.

It was difficult when the time came to tear himself away. But he wanted to be alone, to have space to think. He knew the shifting world was crumbling and that there was

no place for his feet. She clung to him, made him promise, made him swear that he would not leave her long without him.

"Don't desert me, think lightly of me, despise me; because I have shown you my heart."

"But how could I, how could I?"

His heart ran like water to her. Yet he was desperate to get away, to get his footing again in this volcano of a world. The last embrace ended abruptly, for it had come to this . . . he could no longer trust himself.

CHAPTER XXV

WHEN Dennis walked away from Curzon Street it was very late and his mind was a swirl of emotions; there were dead things in it, as one sees in a pool with a swift undercurrent. He walked and walked, trying not to remember, trying to forget; the first hours were half a nightmare and half an ecstasy. One has to remember the purity of his early manhood and all its teachings. He had never been in love before, never met a woman who had proved a temptation: he had not only the dogma but the instinct of his faith. He had not fallen, but he had stumbled, and he knew his feet were still unsteady. It was not mere physical passion that moved him, he could have fought that, for he understood it, in a measure he had been armed against it from his youth upward. This was more subtle. Here was companionship offered him, and all his years he had been companionless; sympathy, and that was something he had only given, not received; love, and he had not known that a woman could love a man in this way, with such surrender. Her welcoming lips came back to him, but not more often than the words, many of the words she had whispered in his ear. Something of what tortured him was the belief that he had a gift for her, a gift he must withhold. She needed what he could give, an absolute comprehension, an understanding of her moods, and strength to meet them. This is what he thought; he felt her weakness, saw himself as a bulwark against it. Her willingness of surrender was a most poignant thing to him, it kept recurring. He could not rid himself of it. It was wonderful, and pitiful. It made him more of a man, putting the

responsibility on him to guard her from herself. He never doubted but that with her, as it was with him, this was the first, the only time, her heart had moved her.

And she was so beautiful. Again he felt the slenderness of her, and the way she had clung to him, then grew hot and so ashamed that he walked more swiftly, cursing himself that he could not guard his thoughts.

Hour after hour passed. He was bent on mastering the situation, getting clear as to the future. He could not let himself drift any farther, could not afford to lose his self-respect. The thought of what "other fellows" would do in such case was no help to him. He knew so many things other fellows had done that would nevertheless always be impossible to him. Sometimes his own thoughts, his own doubts, grew incredible. Lady Diana Wayne, and himself! Great waves of heat went over him at such moments. For the incredible had been true, or so true that he dared not recall it. So the hours passed. Walking helped him only by helping him to fatigue; he was footsore and weary, without power even of self-reproach, when morning dawned.

He had been far afield, never heeding where he went, but it was on Hampstead Heath he found himself when the grey, foggy dawn made something of light about him, touching the heather to a ghostly pallor, and distant London to a mystery of darkness where no man dwelt. Here around him lay shadows, lifting, shifting, pallid and damp. Here on the heath his father had loved, here he had worked, and dreamed dreams, perhaps, of fame or fortune, for wife or son or both; now that same son, with stumbling feet, drew near to truth. The chill air was clean and sweet, and the heath about him was his birthright; he would not forswear it.

He must give it up, give it up before it was too late; he could not go on seeing her. She would forget him; that

thought turned him a little sick. He would still be able to do things for her, from the distance. That thought sustained him. He would be faithful to his wife, to Mabel. Poor Mabel, who deserved no less of him, gentle, unselfish, without fault. He had given his word, his *parole d'honneur*. Now the heath was grey, cold and ghostly, and all the world was a prison. He and Mabel! All the thought of his wife's good goodness could not emblazon her with the other's eyes and hair; eyes with the swift glances that came and went; fragrant hair, and the voice that swept his heart-strings like music. He knew what he was putting aside, but knew he could do no less, having given his word. Dennis's religion was part of his youth, ineradicable; he had given up many of its forms, reason discarding what childhood had accepted without reason; but the spirit he had never discarded.

When he had come to his decision it was still too early in the morning to go home. Always he had felt a mother-want about the world, and now, chilled all through, and tired, the need was urgent. It was Ursula and Agatha who had tried their best that he should never feel it; and it was to the two old maids from the Vicarage he turned in his exhaustion both of body and mind.

They were not far to seek. When their brother had wrecked their home to save his own soul in the cloisters of the Romanists, they had settled down in Church Row, that small street of Georgian houses, where the peace of the centuries broods over the trees planted in the centre, sacrilegious traffic diverted elsewhere. Here was the home Ursula and Agatha had made for themselves, decorous behind the dormer windows. The little house was early astir, blinds were drawn up; while in black shawls, and the caps that they had never learnt to keep straight, with willing hearts and chilled fingers, he found the twin mothers of his boyhood, busy with their household work.

He had no need to ring, for they saw him as he came up the age-worn steps. It was not by any means the first time he had come in the early morning. Many a summer day, when cricket was claiming too many of his hours, and he feared lest they should find him neglectful, he had gone there before breakfast, to listen to their little troubles and tell of his successes or reverses. They were always proud of the Paightons having been a 'cricketing family,' telling old stories, of which Dennis never showed signs of fatigue, of averages, and anecdotes of other times. They knew every club for which Dennis played, every score he made in the season's matches.

This morning he came to them differently; they knew it before he spoke, having the mother instinct, all balked and attenuated though it might be. What trouble ailed him, or could ail him, Dennis, the prosperous, they knew not. Nor was it for them to inquire, it was enough he had come there for sympathy. They could only show it in their own way, in an overwhelming solicitude for his creature comforts. He said simply that he had been walking about all night:

"I thought you wouldn't mind my turning up so early. I'm tired, and cold."

The fire in the dining-room was only just lit. Agatha went on her knees to coax it; Ursula summoned the maid, and commanded that a hot bath should be instantly prepared. Neither of them asked how it came about, though presently they had him in the easy chair, his hands to the blaze, listening to the crackling of the wood which economical Agatha had thrown on lavishly.

"A nice hot bath. And by the time you are out of it, breakfast will be ready and this room thoroughly warm. I shouldn't wonder if you had taken a chill."

And when he had gone upstairs at their bidding there was quite a bustle and fuss about his breakfast; he must

have everything he liked best. The little maid was all alacrity in helping them; as is the way sometimes with little maids, when it is a liberal gentleman upon whom they have to wait.

"Don't hurry over your bath, there is a can of cold water in the corner," one of them called after him, for they knew his ways.

And then all was hurry and bustle to get hot rolls from the baker, a kidney that could be enwrapped in bacon. There must be eggs floating in cream, the mulberry preserve they made themselves. It was delightful to see the happiness they had in making these preparations. It was so little they could do, but they were so eager to do it.

"He is in trouble," was what their eyes telegraphed to each other. While Dennis was in his bath, and breakfast was preparing, they made their silent guesses; they had seen the boy when Abe Abinger died, and when their brother's heart-breaking resolution had been taken; they knew his silent sensitiveness.

"We must remember it is barely ten days since that poor young Mr. Juxton passed away."

"And they were always such friends."

"Poor boy! I wish we could have made scones."

That strain of the woman in Dennis, at which his cricketing friends never guessed, was not hidden from these two old maids.

He came down presently, already refreshed and grateful. They found him looking strangely ill and harassed, but asked no questions, plying him with food, scarcely tasting their own breakfast, so eager were they to watch him do justice to his. With his mouth full he said, as he had said so many times before, that there was no one who could make coffee as they did, that their way of cooking kidneys was a revelation, that he could not understand why mulberry preserve had never become a national dish.

They were very proud of his praise, deprecating it nevertheless.

"My dear boy, as if in your grand house, with all those servants, you could not get a few mulberries preserved."

"Or an egg dished up in a little cream."

And then he heard the regrets about the scones. He told them about the communal meals and how wearisome they had become. It was surprising to learn that Mabel found them as monotonous as he did, and enjoyed the aunts' cooking just as much.

"She says that she always praises everything, and that you seem satisfied. Poor Mabel! She would have made such a splendid housekeeper, she loves it all so, and the servants would do anything for her. But she was so afraid of hurting her father's feelings."

"It is a dreadful arrangement, I think. What are women to do who have no housework to attend to? Nothing but get into mischief. Not that Mabel would ever do that. Dear Mabel! But she would so love to have cooked for you."

It was true, in his heart he knew it was true. And during the course of breakfast he heard more about Mabel's kindnesses to them. If Dennis was the son of this little home, Mabel was the daughter, never varying in affectionate attentions; they chorused her praises. He liked to hear it, for it seemed to make that decision of his more definite and irrevocable. The homing instinct that had brought him here was a true one; he felt insensibly soothed, agreeing with them about Mabel, telling them about her goodness to Fanny, and how her father leaned upon her. He liked, too, telling them of these things; it was but justice to her, bare justice.

When the time came that he must leave them, kissing each parchmented and wrinkled cheek, it was Ursula who found the right word to say, although it was such a little word.

"We know you are in trouble." Ursula spoke for both of them. "My dear boy, it makes us happy you came to us."

And Agatha added softly.

"We can only give you sympathy; you know where to look for strength!"

They would have liked more of his confidence, gentle souls that they were. But they were satisfied when he answered, quite simply, like the boy that he would always be to them:

"You are quite right. I am in trouble, but it is a trouble that will pass. You have helped me, helped me more than you know."

It was only possible to do right, or to do wrong. There were no half-measures. His vows had been made to Mabel, and he meant to keep them.

CHAPTER XXVI

FROM that bountiful breakfast in Church Row Dennis took the Tube, and went straight to the office. His faith in himself was restored. He meant to keep his marriage vows; there would be no harm in being Diana's friend, protector, everything but her lover. Even in the Tube and with his resolution so fixed and irrevocable, he went hot and cold at the word, at the mere vision it conjured up.

Bond Street was hardly awake; there were rugs being shaken in the street, a wandering water-cart, shutters idly taken down, a sense that nine o'clock in Bond Street meant seven o'clock elsewhere. This was the life of the West End, that held high revelry late, and was not expected to be up betimes. There was little or nothing he could do so early, only a few letters and some catalogues to go through.

He had hardly entered the office, still wondering at the slow idleness of the sleepy streets, when he heard the telephone ring sharply. At first he thought he must have been mistaken. But it rang and rang again, persistently. There was no one but himself to answer it, neither of the men had yet put in an appearance, the boy who was taking down the shutters was useless for such a purpose. He took up the instrument:

"Are you there?" came through. "Are you there?"

"I'm here, yes. Who are you?"

"Has Mr. Passiful come to the office yet?"

"Who are you?"

"I'm Mary. Are you Mr. Passiful, sir?"

"Yes. Anything wrong?"

"They've been telephoning from Fitzjohn's Avenue all

night. Mrs. Passiful was sent for late last evening, she left a note for you, she's just rung up to know if you'd come home."

"But what's the matter?"

"It's Mr. Juxton, sir; he's been taken ill, a sort of nervous attack. He don't seem able to get out his words rightly."

He did not wait to hear more, but hung up the machine. This was serious news. He had to wait some time before he could obtain the Fitzjohn's Hall number. Then it was a servant who answered the telephone and told him that Mrs. Passiful was with Mr. Juxton at the moment, the doctor had been and had gone again. There was to be a consultation later on. Presently he was told that Mrs. Passiful had sent word that if he was coming up to Fitzjohn's Avenue she would like him to bring young Mrs. Juxton with him. The car was already on its way to Bond Street. Those had been Mrs. Passiful's orders as soon as she heard that he was at the office, she could not come to the telephone herself. In all her trouble, for that her father's illness would be serious trouble to Mabel he had no doubt, she had been thoughtful of him.

It was difficult to think of Amos as a sick man; difficult to divorce his mind from what obsessed him, and force it into the contemplation of a new set of circumstances.

When the car arrived he questioned the man, but he had come straight from the garage, and knew no more than himself. To fetch Fanny was distasteful, he had not seen her since the argument over the racing accounts. She was not in Grosvenor Street, he knew. It took him a minute or two to remember that she was staying with Margaret Lemon, and to recall Margaret Lemon's address. Pouf-puffing up Berkeley Street, and jumping hastily from the car, he almost ran into Cosmo Merritt. Cosmo, before he had time to speak, explained hurriedly that he had slept at the

Bath Club. Dennis had no interest in where Cosmo was sleeping, but Cosmo had an undoubted curiosity to know what was the meaning of Dennis's appearance at this unearthly hour outside Margaret's flat. He was really concerned when he heard of Amos's illness, genuinely concerned. He volunteered to go and fetch Fanny and break the news to her.

Dennis stood beside the car while Cosmo went on his self-imposed mission. Berkeley Street was not so backward as Bond Street. There were signs of life at many an open window, tradesmen's carts were delivering their goods, heavy vans blocked the narrow roadway. Beyond, the leafless trees in the Lansdowne garden seemed to set his thoughts free. Amos's illness showed him again, if he had wanted to be shown, that all of his duty stood between him and any . . . "complication" was the word he had in his mind, and it was a good one. His father-in-law had always trusted him, relied upon him completely, as Mabel did. And their reliance was justified; he was a strong man, not a weak one. If he wavered, and who would not waver under such circumstances as his? in essentials he remained firm. Renunciation. There was something in the sound of it that was big. He could not contemplate subterfuge, and secret meetings; it must be all, or nothing. "All" meant abandoning Mabel, and that could not be thought of.

How sweet she was! But he must not remember how sweet she was. What would she think of him? Surely she would understand. They could still meet sometimes. But could he trust himself? That was the problem, a problem with which he wrestled whilst he waited for Fanny in the early morning confusion of traffic in Berkeley Street, and only the leafless trees made thought possible. Of course he had to see her again, to-day, as soon as possible. He must tell her. That flush came again upon him, and before it had faded Fanny and Cosmo had appeared, talking very

earnestly. He heard Cosmo telling Fanny she was to be very careful; it changed the current of his thoughts. The time had gone by when Dennis Passiful could do without thinking.

Fanny was in the most expensive weeds, she had obviously also made them as becoming as possible, the coquettish toque with the line of white inside and the long fine streamers, the coat of dull satin and black fur, was all of calculated impressiveness. A week ago Mabel had feared lest in her remorse Fanny might commit suicide; she had confided her fears to her husband. There was nothing suicidal about Fanny this morning. When they had said good-bye to Cosmo, and were being driven up to Hampstead, Dennis found her uncongenially cheerful, full of queries as to the nature of Amos's illness, and whether he or Mabel had sent for her. She disgusted him by wondering, as if inconsequently, whether Amos was really as rich as people said. She was bent on conciliating him, full of talk about her visit and the 'smart' men she had met at Mrs. Lemon's flat. She effectively prevented him from indulging in retrospection, he could see nothing but flamboyant weeds.

When he stopped the car at the foot of Fitzjohn's Avenue Fanny complained that in her heavy cloak and long dress she really could not walk up; but he was peremptory that he would not risk disturbing the invalid by letting the puffing car go up to the house. Then they walked the little distance in comparative silence, for Fanny was really embarrassed by her rich clothes.

Mabel, scarcely recovered from her grief and fatigue at Ted's bedside, nevertheless met them with cheerfulness.

"Dr. Lauder says we are not to be alarmed, it is not at all serious, only nervous breakdown. Father was frightened about himself, he *would* have you both sent for. Last night he couldn't get out the right words, the words he

wanted, it was that frightened him. Dr. Lauder said it was only '*aphasia*,' quite a well-known nervous symptom, not at all dangerous; he is ever so much better this morning." She kissed Fanny, and helped to unwrap her from her heavy cloak. "And oh, Dennis, where were you last night? I tried everywhere to find you." She ran through the names of many of his Club friends. "I tried everyone I could think of. I never told Mary to go to bed until past one. Father didn't want me to leave him. Mary says you didn't come home at all, but of course that means she didn't hear you. You must have been out again very early! I rang up at seven."

"I breakfasted in Church Row." He was very short in his answer, perhaps a trifle confused. Fanny gave a short laugh, but Mabel was completely satisfied, completely unsuspicious. She asked after the old ladies affectionately, saying it was 'so like' Dennis to have gone up to them.

It was Fanny who, presently, when Mabel had gone upstairs to see if her father would receive them, with an engaging little *moue* began to rally him upon his nocturnal absence from home. Pretty little Fanny had a coarsish little mind. What she implied caused him to flush angrily, and to answer her, perhaps, rather rudely. Mabel, running down with the news that father was asleep again and not to be disturbed, found them at loggerheads.

"Oh, dear! I do wish you two would not quarrel! At such a time as this we ought all to keep together."

Fanny laughed again. Dennis began a furious sentence, but stopped in time. Mabel was right, and what did it matter what Fanny said or thought?

CHAPTER XXVII

Amos slept, or Amos was resting after his sleep, or there was a consultation of doctors. His illness lost nothing of importance when he sent down word from time to time that none of them were to leave the house, that he would see Dennis as soon as possible, that it was urgent he should see him. Dennis had his own affairs, private affairs, to attend to, but how could he urge them? Mabel said complacently that it was fortunate Mr. Dolland was in town. Fanny put in mischievously that perhaps it was not Bond Street only from which Dennis was being kept. To avoid her ill-timed humour or curiosity, he went himself to the post office with a wire. After last night, he could not leave Diana without a letter or a message.

Detained in Hampstead. Father-in-law seriously ill.

In a way he was glad of the opportunity to put off that inevitable renunciation, it gave him time, a breathing space. He could not guess what would accrue from it. He need not, either, have feared that Diana would remain in ignorance of Amos Juxton's illness. The newspaper boys were crying it in the streets as they sold the early second editions of the papers.

Amos had suggested last night, with what speech was left to him, that the press should be early advised. There was panic already at the Kemble Theatre, and all the morning cabs were dashing up to the doors of the great house in Fitzjohn's Avenue, with people imploring news, insisting on interviews, demanding details. Poor Mabel was almost run off her legs. And there was Roddy, too, to com-

plicate her perplexities. Roddy dashed up to know what was going to be done about the Kemble.

It seemed now that everything was wrong at the theatre. Amos's nervous breakdown may have been due to the daily and hourly calls there had been upon him for readjustment of its affairs. The artistes were at loggerheads, the lighting, the bars, the front and back of the house, wanted attention; nothing ran smoothly. "Charles Auchester" was not playing to empty benches, but it was playing to paper, and sparse houses. There was money wanted, a great deal of money apparently, to keep it going, to force the public to come and see for themselves how venal was the press, how great was Mr. Roderick Ainsworth. For that was what it came to, as Roddy told it to Mabel this first morning of her father's illness. There was hardly anything Roddy had not wanted altered, from the composition of the chorus to the decomposition of their costumes. In his anxiety for the public morals Amos had had all the dresses 'too long,' so Roddy said. He wanted new posters, and the town placarded, sandwich-men, songs that had been cut out to be replaced.

Amos apparently had not known how much money a theatre could lose until the accounts came before him. Yet according to Roddy Ainsworth the piece was being starved. Cosmo, on the other hand, had already said that all that was wanted was a new tenor! Amos had hardly known what to think between them, the atmosphere of the theatre was new to him, he could not learn it as quickly as he had learned every other enterprise with which he had been associated. His intelligence was a ledger intelligence, and the personal element with which he was confronted made the figures dance before his bewildered eyes. Perhaps it was to this confusion he had succumbed.

"They will have to fight it out amongst them," he said to Dr. Lauder querulously, when he heard that both Roddy

and Cosmo Merritt were downstairs. Dr. Lauder saw no reason why they should not, so long as his patient was left in peace.

Cosmo was in the drawing-room at the very moment Roddy was bewildering Mabel by his queries, and the overwhelming array of arguments with which she was to ply her father, whether he was or was not well enough to listen to them. The house was practically pandemonium; there were reporters in the hall, delegates from Juxton's Limited, and every other industry; for it seemed as if there was none with which Amos was not connected.

Amos, recovering from his fright about himself, under the judicious treatment of Dr. Lauder, heard with satisfaction that his "house was being run down." He explained to the nurses, to the doctors called in consultation, even to his valet, that when a man of his large enterprises was indisposed it was a very serious matter, very serious indeed. He was beginning to be pompous again. His illness had really been coming on for some time; ever since Ted's death he had found it difficult to concentrate his thoughts, or to express them in words. It was the failure of words that alarmed him, and made him send hurriedly for Mabel and Dr. Lauder and give himself up for lost. That was last night. This morning with the assurance from Lauder that it was purely a nervous phenomenon — "aphasia," which was new to him, and sounded sufficiently important — not paralysis, nor apoplexy, which he had feared, he was resigned to the complete "rest" that was ordered him; he was even already wondering how to get the largest amount of indirect advertisement from it. He no longer felt uneasy about his condition, but he had no idea of allowing it to be made light of.

When at length Dennis was admitted to the bedroom, Amos, his head high on the pillows of the panoplied bed,

asked at once if Dennis knew that he was very ill; very ill indeed. "When he wanted a towel, he had asked for his boots," he quavered out. He had many instructions for his son-in-law; and once, inadvertently, he called him 'Ted'; then recalling himself, said forlornly:

"I've only you to look to, my boy."

But it seemed to Dennis that he was making as much as possible of his forlornness.

Dennis was to interview the press agents, the men who called on business, the troublesome theatre people. Mabel could see all personal friends. Presently, when he was more composed, Fanny could come up, and entertain him. But there was a proviso that she was not to come up in mourning, she was to put off her weeds for one day at least. The doctors had said that he was suffering from 'nervous prostration' as well as aphasia, and nothing must be done that might increase it. No one was to tell him anything that might distress him; all bad news was to be kept away. His pomposity really increased enormously as the day went on, and he realised what was expected of an invalid.

Dr. Lauder was quite satisfied with him under this aspect, and the consultants did as consultants have done from time immemorial. They had asked Dr. Lauder if he had anything he wished them to say or do, and when he said, "No, nothing at all," they talked about the weather and of golf, and having signed an enigmatic bulletin which Dr. Lauder and Amos prepared, they took their big fees and their departure. But not without arranging to meet again to-morrow.

It was about two-thirty in the afternoon when Dennis had his second interview with the invalid. Amos was now sitting up by the big bow window that overlooked the garden, in a velvet smoking-jacket and, for some inexplicable reason, a white waistcoat. His feet were stretched out before him on a stool; his hands folded over his undimin-

ished paunch. He looked like the figure of the Chinese God of Plenty, more benignant even than a Buddha; but his colour was pasty, the thin centre parting of his hair thinner than before; his tongue trembled in his mouth when he spoke, and it was true that he frequently used the wrong word.

"I am not done yet: they'll see that when I get about again; it's only a temporary thing."

He said permanent when he meant temporary, but it is unnecessary to reproduce the mistakes he made; he was easily comprehensible to his son-in-law, and when he had closely interrogated him about every detail he added: "I must not be worried about business, or the theatre, or anything."

Dennis promised to do what he could to relieve him, and was detained for further instructions. It was past four o'clock before he got away finally.

When at last he made his escape from the sick-room, and ultimately from the house, he had a curious illusion. It must have been an illusion. Amos had placed the motor at his disposal, it was going swiftly, and Dennis's thoughts more swiftly still. A vision of a face flashed past him, the one face, in another motor. He might have been mistaken. Why should she be here, in Fitzjohn's Avenue? It was absurd, impossible. Amos had overwhelmed him with commissions, he had to go here and there, and he knew that he must concentrate on the matters in hand and leave other considerations to the future. As he drove on, he did not think it wonderful he should have had that illusion of seeing her pass him, his heart was so full of her, and what he must say to her about parting. It seemed to grow harder, not less hard. He had had so little personal life, everything was sordid and commonplace but this, and this he must give up. Now it was Amos's commissions to which he must attend; after that he must see

Dolland. Amos's affairs would prevent him from undertaking that journey to Provence; the tapestries must go; even if they must fall into the hands of Murray Straus. Dennis was very sorry for himself as he was driven westward.

That face he had seen in the swiftly passing motor had been no illusion. Amos Juxton was a public character, Diana's brother's friend. Why should she not drive up to Hampstead, and make a personal inquiry, leave a card, exhibit her sympathy? Perhaps she had a reservation, or expectation, of seeing Dennis. After such an experience as theirs of last night, and the dreams that had succeeded it, it was natural she should wish to see him soon; their intimacy was so established. If she had to blush at the phrases into which she put that for which there are no phrases, or none that a woman may use even to herself, no one saw her blushes. A pity perhaps, she looked so exquisitely lovely when she blushed.

She had meant to make an inquiry at the door, to leave a card. The wild thought that she might see Dennis, or he her, was barely formulated. Yet when the footman came back with the message that Mr. Juxton was just the same, would she please come in, she actually found herself descending from the motor. Cosmo, sitting with Fanny in the drawing-room, saw her drive up. Cosmo incautiously exclaimed:

"By God, it's Diana!"

He was so startled that he forgot to be careful, putting a strange weapon into hands cruel to use it.

"I am off, I don't want to meet her. It is that incredible brother-in-law of yours supplying the petrol to the car. Extraordinary!"

Cosmo bolted, got out of the French windows into the garden, and so from the house. Fanny lost no time in instructing the man. He was to ask Lady Diana to come

in, to say the family were receiving, they preferred to tell the news about Mr. Juxton themselves, he was to say anything that would make her come in. Fanny was breathless and undignified. Fanny's suburbanism survived all her changes of address. It would be a great thing for her to receive an earl's daughter.

When Diana, a little surprised to find herself there, came into the room, Fanny was an even greater surprise.

"How good of you to call!" Fanny's gentility was again at its high-water mark; her hand was outstretched at the very latest fashionable angle. "Do sit down."

To Lady Diana Wayne, Fanny's type was almost unknown, and all her surroundings strange to her. Amos Juxton's drawing-room was but a glorified edition of the one he had prepared for Mabel. There were more *carton pierre* pillars and pilasters, huge mirrors and modern academic oil paintings, the upholstery was more florid, the gilt and ormolu more pronounced. Diana could not but glance around her; it was all so extraordinarily unlike the drawing-rooms of her friends. Fanny, too, was unusual. The coloured dress that, according to instructions, she had sent for before visiting Amos, was of different shades of violet, it had a profuse trimming of white beads, a trimming fashionable, even ultra-fashionable, so Fanny had been assured, and that it had emanated from Paris. Lady Diana, skilled somewhat in the art of dress, mentally labelled it as Vienna. It had elbow sleeves, and showed Fanny's lean arms and cruel hands. When she sat down Diana noticed the open-worked brown stockings and shoes to match. Diana had sometimes idly wondered who it was that read fashion papers and were guided by "Answers to Correspondents" in dress columns. She thought this must be it. It passed through her mind that she would like to know what hat Fanny wore with this costume. She surmised a turban, but in that she wronged her. Fanny

had had three enormous feathers dyed to match the three violets in her dress, and wore them proudly on a hat that had the dimensions of a cartwheel. She regretted the hat whilst Diana sat before her in her dark and clinging draperies, the sable cape graceful on her sloping shoulders. She knew she was unlike her visitor, but the hat had been infallible. There were white coral beads, too, that she might have worn. Fanny began to explain at once why she was out of mourning, and that her toilette was incomplete.

"You will be surprised to see me in colours; of course this dress is just put on anyhow;" and she deprecated it, although she was convinced of its style. "My father-in-law cannot bear mourning, even when he is well. Now that he is so bad we all have to humour him."

"Is he really so ill? I had hoped not; that there was some improvement? Mr. Juxton is, you know, perhaps, a great friend of my brother's. He has collaborated with him. . . ." She paused; it seemed to her she had somehow caught the atmosphere of the house, or of Fanny. Why should she explain or apologise for her presence here?

"Oh, I know Cossy very well, very well indeed!"

Fanny smiled enigmatically, and Diana all at once hated herself for having come here. She rose to go, although she had only just sat down. But Fanny was quick in ordering tea. Fanny's hospitality on this occasion, and in her father-in-law's house, was overwhelming. She determined to improve this opportunity of becoming acquainted with Cosmo's sister. Lady Diana Wayne's anxiety to get away had no chance against Fanny's determination. The battle of their wills was over before the kettle had been brought in, and the small table, laden with cakes. Perhaps Diana's resistance had not been whole-hearted. Dennis's wire had said that he was here,

at any moment the door might open and he enter. Fanny apologised for the absence of her sister-in-law.

"Mrs. Passiful is with her father?" Diana asked, she hoped indifferently. She did not think she could face Dennis's wife, just this afternoon, and talk social commonplaces to her, treat her as if she were the wife of any other man. She kept her eyes down; if there was embarrassment in them Fanny could not see it; if her face flushed she could hope that too was invisible.

"Oh dear, no!" Fanny's laugh was new to Diana; it was so unlike the laughter of other women, had no gaiety or spontaneity in it, only malice. "Mabel isn't with her father, Mabel is closeted with Roddy Ainsworth in the library." The implication was without disguise. Diana's flush faded to pallor, and she was sick with disgust. Something of this story at which Fanny was hinting she had heard from Cosmo, some of it she had surmised. But this brought it so close. Again she rose.

"I really must be going."

"Oh, no, don't hurry away. The house is so dull, so gloomy."

And Diana wanted to hear more. She hated herself for wanting it, and Fanny for being so ready to gratify her, but such hatred did not bear her from the room, on the contrary it kept her where she was. But Fanny was wary with her story, hardly believing that it could be of much interest to her visitor, yet already jealous of the possibility of Dennis having made such a conquest; jealous and incredulous. She sat down between Diana and the door, cutting off retreat. Then without a moment's pause she plied her visitor with cake and tea and high-toned gossip; she even got in the Club, and something about Miss Jones, although it was not to be expected Lady Diana would interest herself "in such people."

Diana was stunned by the avalanche of talk and tea.

She knew she ought not to have come, she felt weak, and as if escape was now impossible. There was always, however, the possibility of the door opening, and of Dennis appearing. She answered very little; she had really no attention for what Fanny was saying. It was not until there came a break in the questions of whether she knew this person, or the other — the Club leaven of people with whom she might be expected to be acquainted, and whose acquaintance with herself Fanny wished at all hazards to air — that she found herself listening again.

"Have you been to our theatre, the Kemble? I suppose you have seen 'Charles Auchester'?"

With people of different social standing, question and answer are the only means of intercourse. Fanny had not grown beyond this elementary method.

"Were you there on the first night? I suppose you noticed how flat Roddy Ainsworth was. Don't you think it is a shame that she forced him on the piece?"

Another of Fanny's methods of emerging from obscurity was to call all the people she did not know by their first names or abbreviations. After the unjustifiable "Roddy," she ran through a few of the other performers, always in diminutives, or nicknames. The "our theatre" and the nicknames would establish, at least, her intimacy with the stage, and even that was better than her legitimate obscurity.

Diana was languid now, with her tea-cup, and air of aloofness, through which the other could not penetrate. But she heard the name Roddy Ainsworth, and her wish to be elsewhere had no activity. She repeated it, as if inquiringly.

"Ainsworth, Roderick Ainsworth! The man who played Seraphino? Yes, I was there on the first night. I thought he had rather a fine voice. A friend of your sister-in-law's, you say?"

"Friend!" Fanny laughed again. "Well, that's one name for it!"

Diana put down her tea-cup; it is possible her hand was not quite steady. She wanted Fanny to continue, although she did not wish to make this obvious. And then her courage came to her. She felt she had allowed herself to be intimidated by this ill-bred little woman, to be overwhelmed by her and kept against her will. Now she had an access of courage, and a resumption of her personality. She looked at Fanny, and said indifferently:

"How very interesting! More than a friend! How much more?" It was almost a note of intimacy, so Fanny thought. Certainly it was the first moment in the interview that Cossy's sister had shown any sign of life, of animation, of being entertained by what Fanny still thought was rather a pretty wit, a social capacity. Now she hinted at the same story with which she had entertained Cossy, with smiles and knowing glances, with expressive eyebrows, and movement of the hands.

"He really *is* very good-looking, on the stage as well as off. They knew each other very well when they were children. When he came back from Australia," she laughed, and her back was rounded as she bent forward, "they began to know each other better."

"But she has a husband. I thought there was a Mr. Passiful . . .?"

Diana was really ashamed of herself, but she was longing for news of Dennis, even for the sound of his name. She was all at sea as to what he was doing, she wanted to hear. Fanny shrugged her shoulders.

"Oh, yes, she has a husband! Husbands are proverbially the last people to know what is going on. Dennis is blind, or deaf, although I don't suppose he knows half as much as I do."

Diana knew she must get away from this horrid little woman.

"How very dreadful!"

She rose again and put out her gloved hand, she felt glad it was gloved.

"What dreadful things you are telling me! I really must go now."

And then, because she really wanted to hear for certain that Dennis's wife had no claim upon his consideration, that neither his nor her conscience need reproach them, and perhaps because it was the usual thing to say, and non-committal, she added:

"You will come and see me one day, won't you?" She did not reckon upon the avidity with which Fanny pounced upon the vague invitation.

Fanny was prompt to turn the general into the particular, she had no idea of letting her opportunity slip. It was in her best manner, her highest note, that she said, with the pumphandle action of her hands:

"I should like to *so* much! When is the best time to find you? Are you ever at home at lunch time?"

Diana, taken aback, really off her guard, said:

"Oh, yes!"

Fanny waited expectant, she had not even dropped her hand. Fanny was a persistent Free Fooder, but this was more than free food to her. It was Social Recognition, and from Cosmo's sister!

"I shall be in the West end to-morrow, will you be at home to lunch to-morrow?"

Diana was really nonplussed; she could only say that to-morrow would suit her very well, only wonder how she could endure the woman, how she had endured her for the last ten minutes.

And then, before she quite realised to what she had committed herself, Fanny put the coping-stone on her

methods by asking if Lady Diana was going straight home. Diana said "Yes" hurriedly. She thought the inquiry was preliminary to asking her to prolong her visit, to wait and see Mabel, or Dennis, she did not know her way about in this social maze where she found herself.

"Well, would you mind waiting half a minute? It wouldn't take me longer than that to get into my things. I want to go to Grosvenor Street, if you wouldn't mind dropping me. Both our cars are out . . ."

Fanny was breathless, the scheme had only just occurred to her. She would be seen driving with Lady Diana Wayne, she would be able to say: "When Lady Diana and I . . ." In a flash she saw the establishment of her position at the Club.

She really dressed more quickly than she had ever done since her childhood's days, when a ragged pinafore and a sunbonnet had sufficed her. She was in all the pomp and circumstance of her distinguished weeds when she found herself by Lady Diana's side in the motor.

She sat well upright, hoping exceedingly that some of the Juxtons' Hampstead friends would see her. She talked with the utmost animation all the time they drove, delighted at the thought of her position by Lady Diana's side, excited at the prospect of the mischief she was making, wondering how she could turn it best to her own advantage.

"Until to-morrow then," were her last words to Diana when the car put her down, not at Grosvenor Street, she had altered her mind, but at Margaret's flat. "Until to-morrow."

Cosmo, however, was there before her. Cosmo was for the moment a little depressed about his own prospects. He had not been asked upstairs where Amos sat in state using his wrong words pompously, and he believed in the exaggerated newspaper reports of his condition. He believed Amos had had a stroke and might have another. The

way Fanny had taken certain things for granted since Ted's death had given him a permanent cold in his spine. So he told Margaret, who had been his confidante for so long.

"She has a way of saying, 'I shall keep at least a year for Ted,' that simply paralyses me."

Matrimony was not in his programme, not in any programme he had devised for himself, but Fanny had the pertinacity of the proverbial limpet.

"I see myself taken by the scruff of the neck and landed in a registry office. . . ."

Margaret had cheered him. Still there was no doubt at the moment that Cosmo's prospects were very uncertain, and complicated by Amos's illness. "The Tale and the Typewriter" was ready, but Amos might die, and there was no contract nor agreement that would bind his executors. But if Amos did die, against Cosmo's interests and with unparalleled selfishness, his fortune must go somewhere, and if to Fanny . . .

"You simply could not do it, Cossy. She might take you by the scruff of the neck, as you say, and land you in a registry office, but you would never say the responses. I suppose there are responses in a registry office? She won't get that million or so of Amos's. I don't suppose he is going to die either. The supposition is giving him indirect advertisement. I'm sure I recognise his hand in the guarded announcements. If she had any amount of millions you couldn't do it. You recognise the Borgia in her as well as I do. It scares you, it almost scares me. I want to get her out of the flat. That poor fellow did not die a natural death. I shouldn't like to trust her with Amos's food or medicine bottles, if she knows that she benefits from his will. No, Cossy, I am quite willing to give you up, or share you. I have never been selfish about you, have I? But Fanny! cattish, spiteful little Fanny,

with the Borgia hands, poor Ted's blood upon them . . ." Margaret shuddered.

And that was the moment Fanny walked in upon them, and was instantly, and, strangely enough, for the first time, conscious of their intimacy, that she herself was an intruder. She was conscious of this, although Margaret was gracious, and charming, still the admirable hostess; although Cosmo got up from the sofa on which he had been sitting with Margaret, and moved to relieve her of her wraps. She stood looking from one to another, the look poor Ted had known so well obliterating in a moment the good humour that her drive, her invitation for the morrow, had brought her. She turned yellow, and spoke hurriedly of headache. Margaret may have guessed what ailed her; Cosmo, for once, was more obtuse. He asked how long his sister had stayed, and how Fanny had been able to get away, whether she had seen Amos, and what he had said to her. Fanny answered sullenly, but for sullenness he read disappointment. He thought he could guess how Diana would have treated Fanny. That his guess was so wide of the mark was a secret he might have known if she had not come in so unexpectedly, surprising him and Margaret Lemon on such terms. All the feeling of which Fanny was capable, other than spite and malice and pure evil, was concentrated in Cosmo. At the moment she hated all the world.

When, on the plea of headache, she was able to get away from the two of them, and escape to her own room, her hatred of everybody was at its height. She had only half believed the story she had laughed over with Cossy, and told to his sister because she thought it would please her. Now she made herself believe that it was true. And if it were true, Amos ought to hear of it. Amos could not bear the shadow of a scandal, he was always talking about the purity of the domestic hearth. He should hear about

Mabel, she would tell him herself. He wouldn't leave his money to Mabel if he knew the game she was playing with Roddy Ainsworth, who sang flat, and was ruining the piece. When she had told Amos he would shut the theatre. She thought of that because it would punish Cosmo; that was the revenge she would have upon Cosmo. Fanny thought she could make her story good. If there was really anything between Dennis and Cossy's sister, as Cosmo had suggested, and of which Fanny could see corroboration, Dennis would be glad to believe the tale so that he could get rid of his wife.

And then Fanny began to think of what further part she could take in the brew she was preparing; and how she could make it most beneficial to herself.

CHAPTER XXVIII

EVER since Dennis's determination had been taken, it had been weakening. A man doesn't care for his body to remind him he has played Joseph. Many times in that long day that he spent in attending to his father-in-law's affairs, Dennis had had that experience. He had many a flushing moment in which he felt that he was being a prig, and that he would not have the strength of his convictions.

Diana, however, was not alone when he rushed into Curzon Street for a moment, before going back to the Hall. The time she could accord to Dennis was only sufficient for him to tell her she was looking lovelier than ever, which happened to be true, and to assure and reassure her hurriedly that she was wrong in thinking he cared less for her than he had last night, or thought less of her, all of which she contrived to ask him in that interrupted minute. It would be impossible, *impossible* that he could ever care less for her, because she had been so good to him, so sweet.

And as he spoke he thought again he never could care less for her, and that to give her up would be to tear his heart up by the roots. He felt that strange pain of love. Then he was obliged to leave, for she was living in a world of conventions, just now among guests, and there was no chance of a *tête-à-tête*.

"Only until to-morrow," she whispered to him as she bade him good-bye. For it seemed now that she counted on seeing him daily, that what had occurred last night bound them both. To her at least no idea of renunciation had come. On the contrary, what Fanny had told her,

gave her a fresh claim upon him. For since he had so bad a wife, this was her reasoning, it was for her to show him what a woman could be to a man for whom she cared. If he could become free, nothing should stand between them. She had come to that point; she was really in love with him, or perhaps with his forbearance.

The next morning she wrote to him, and he replied, as a man must reply to a lady's letter, especially to a lady's love letter, the more so when he reciprocates her feelings, and has been awake half the night, aware of them, and weakening as to the necessity of that renunciation that yesterday seemed inevitable. He felt himself stronger than he had done then. He had made too much of an unguarded moment. And, after all, what Mabel did not know could not hurt her. This was the form in which his newly found strength presented his dilemma during the night.

In the morning he answered love letter with love letter, and his was not the least warm. He would come round to her this afternoon. She said that she might have "something to tell him." Love's secrets are sweet, perhaps she had dreamed of him as he of her; he would hear in the afternoon.

At two o'clock that day Fanny went to lunch in Curzon Street. Dennis knew nothing about this event; Diana had had no time to tell him. Cosmo and Lord Haverford arrived shortly after Fanny, unexpectedly, but it was not an unusual circumstance for them to come in at an hour when Diana was to be found at home, and her father absent. Lord Loughborough preferred his Club at midday. Diana found Fanny more possible in her weeds than she had been in her violet and beaded finery; but she was quite glad when the others came in. She knew that Dolly would not complain of her underbreeding, and that Cossy was well acquainted with her. Cosmo concealed, in a

way that did him credit, his immeasurable amazement at seeing Fanny with his sister.

The lunch party went off better, though more surprisingly, than Diana had anticipated. It astonished her, for instance, to find that Fanny and Lord Haverford had met before, apparently with some frequency; it was Fanny who made this apparent. And Dolly, notwithstanding that his cousin Diana held his heart, and he wanted nothing so much as that she should be his wife, was certainly not averse from being flirted with by a pretty woman.

Fanny looked pretty to-day, Diana could afford to admit it. The black garments with the decorous lawn collar and cuffs, the little toque with its long streamers and white line, turned the yellows of her fair skin to a transparent, rather charming pallor. She smiled often, showing her pretty teeth. She purred at Diana, was delightfully arch with Haverford. If she gave Cossy an occasional little tap with her claw, there was no blood to be drawn from Cossy, and it served to amuse the already exhilarated Haverford. Perhaps he was not unwilling that Diana should see that there were women who found him attractive.

Fanny's head was almost turned; to find herself in such society was something, but to find herself the centre of it was intoxicating. She had no doubt she was the centre of it. Lady Diana was very beautiful, but it was to her, to Fanny, that Lord Haverford wanted to talk. She did not perceive how little choice he had. She aired all those little distinctions which marked her off from the common herd; ate nothing, but played with an egg, discarding truffle and cream. Lord Loughborough kept an excellent cook, and even an egg in Curzon Street was a thing glorified and transfigured. Fanny talked about pickles and salted almonds, said she never ate anything else if she could help it. Haverford said she ought to live on nectar and am-

brosia! Fanny showed her teeth again at that, and said she didn't know where to get them.

"Were you surprised to hear I had called upon your friends?" Diana asked Cossy, under cover of the amenities the other two were exchanging.

"No, not exactly surprised," Cosmo answered coolly, first emptying his glass deliberately, and then setting it down with the observation that the Governor had a fine taste in port, and no one could complain of the champagne he laid down, but this hock was an outrage. Diana would have defended the hock, but Cosmo, rather pleased at the opening she had given him, went back to her former question. Of course he had been astonished to find Fanny in his sister's drawing-room, and more than displeased. Fanny had kept the news from him, and for that he would reckon with her later.

"No, not exactly surprised! Perhaps a little disappointed. I thought you were above that sort of thing. But surprised . . . no. You would hardly believe it, but I, too, have been run after by women."

She coloured hotly.

"What do you mean by that?" But she had little doubt of his meaning.

"You don't really suppose your penchant for the good-looking picture-dealer has escaped my fraternal eye? Only I should hardly have thought you would be so hot on the scent. Is he really so captivating? I know that Hampstead maidens offer him adoration, and in cricketing circles they call him 'the school-girl's dream'; but you! Get me some claret, Baines, and see that it is warmed; this hock is really undrinkable, it accounts for the popularity of whisky and soda. I hope I have not annoyed you," he added politely to Diana. "Of course he is remarkably handsome, and of impeccable virtue. You have found that out, haven't you?"

He *was* annoying her, as he well knew; and the last phrase perhaps stung her most. She met it with a change of colour that startled him, set him thinking. And with Cosmo thinking was an intelligent process. He went on talking of Dennis, of his success with suburban ladies. He quoted to her that someone had said he looked like a gentleman in his shop, and a shopwalker out of it; but she had no doubt as to the author of the quotation, and that it was Cosmo's. He talked of his cricket, admitting he was no flannelled fool, if something of an oaf.

She knew he was trying to put Dennis before her in a light that belittled him; he could not imagine how far the thing had gone between them, or how much farther she was prepared, even longing, to carry it.

It was after luncheon, when the two ladies sat together in the drawing-room, for in some respects this was still an old-fashioned house, that Fanny had her opportunity. If Diana resented her, resented her presence there at all, and determined it should be a unique occasion, she nevertheless listened when Fanny led the conversation to Dennis, who, it appeared, had told her of the Loughborough pictures. This was a random shot, but it had reached its mark.

"Would you care to see the drawings?" She wanted to hear all Fanny had to say of the relations of Dennis with his wife; and she knew Fanny would tell her what she wanted to hear. Women have a way of understanding each other in these matters. But both of them feinted.

Fanny for the life of her could not have distinguished a painting from an oleograph, a drawing from an aquatint, but she positively gushed at the suggestion, and said how she loved 'old things.' Diana drew her attention to Lord Loughborough's latest acquisition, the stippled full length of "Lady Farren" that stood temporarily on an easel.

"How exquisite!" Fanny exclaimed, and was safe, but when she risked "I do think these old woodcuts are

so wonderful!" Diana gasped, and dropped the subject. Positively it was she herself who gave the next lead, whilst Fanny was cudgelling her little brain for a way to introduce the one subject which they were both anxious to discuss.

"And how is 'Charles Auchester' going? You told me you had an interest in it, didn't you, or in the theatre?"

"I said my sister-in-law had a great interest in the leading actor."

"Oh yes, that was it; and how does the affair progress? Is her husband still acquiescent, and she enamoured?"

"I don't know about his being still acquiescent. He certainly takes advantage of his freedom."

"Freedom?"

Diana heard of the difficulty in finding him on the night when Amos was taken ill. She asked the date carelessly. If she flattered herself that she in no way changed countenance, she gave Fanny less credit for sharpness of observation than she deserved.

So that night he had not gone home at all! She pictured him wandering again, as once he had told her he wandered, the vision of her, as of the Holy Grail, leading him on, and ever on. Her smile was quite unconscious. She had lost the thread of Fanny's discourse, visioning him like this. When she regained her hold upon it, Fanny was talking of the day she had called in Hamilton Terrace and had been refused admittance. The story gathered detail in the telling. If Diana listened to it uncomfortably, she yet listened. It was of course not really of moment to her what Dennis Passiful's wife did or left undone. And yet she was glad to hear of Mabel's supposed turpitude of conduct. Fanny had no scruples, she made Mabel out very subtle and secret in her love affairs, and appeared quite indignant as to the way Dennis and Amos were being taken in.

She felt she was making repayment for her luncheon by entertaining her hostess with these matters.

But when the two men came up it seemed that she forgot that Lady Diana was her hostess, and the courtesy that was due to her. There was an almost immediate resumption of somewhat gross badinage — flippancy, punctuated with laughter — between her and Lord Haverford. She drew upon her intimacy with Diana's brother, and called him Cosmo more often than necessary. She almost forgot to be ladylike in the exuberance of the success that she felt she was enjoying. Dolly's familiar guffaw began to vex Diana. It was not because he was her fiancé, but because he was a fool, and her cousin, that she resented his present behaviour, knowing nevertheless it was partly due to her contempt, and in bravado.

"Can't you take her away?" she asked presently of Cosmo.

"I don't think you deserve that I should," Cosmo answered in the same undertone.

She thought it better now to meet him on his own ground.

"And I thought I was doing such a nice sisterly thing. I always understood you admired her."

Their eyes met in comprehension, but hers were full of vexation.

"Was it really only Amos Juxton's money bags?"

"The Governor will have to get him a knighthood. I've never asked him for anything for myself. A knighthood for Amos will cost nothing, can be easily managed, I should think. There is Sir Moses Maher, and Sir Thomas Frumpton. One more ennobled grocer will do the country no harm, make the Liberal Government no more ridiculous than they are. 'Sir Amos Juxton.' I must be able to bear him the news. Will you ask my father?"

Lord Haverford's laugh rang out again, he was rising to Fanny's wiles like a tickled trout.

"Will you take her away?"

"Will you ask for the knighthood?"

"You'll give her up?"

"Come now, don't play the heavy sister; do you think I am enjoying the exhibition she is making of herself?"

"But you must have seen her like this before."

"Not exactly."

It was true, he knew her well, of course; she had served his purpose, too. But he was intrinsically lazy, and it had been easier to drift than to break off relations. Latterly it would seem that she had misunderstood him, that she was prepared to make difficulties. Nevertheless, and in spite of the fears which he had confided to Margaret, he had not the slightest doubt that he could deal with Fanny. She really rather nauseated him to-day, but the feeling had been coming on for a long time.

He told her he was going her way, and would see her home. She tossed her head and said that there was no doubt someone would see her home! This was "arch" and for Lord Haverford's benefit. But half a glance from Diana's eyes had told Dolly that he might stay. It was an impulse which prompted Diana to show him the ghost of an encouragement; it was a wholly unworthy impulse, for she could not condescend to compete with a Fanny. She had all her work cut out to rid herself of him presently, and thus got her deserts.

"How on earth did you manage to get my sister to invite you to Curzon Street?" was Cosmo's brutal comment, as he found himself in the street with Fanny. He went on to tell her she had been a fool to make such a dead set at Haverford. Cosmo was relentless in his present mood. He was really concerned about his sister and Dennis, suspecting Fanny of having intrigued in some way. With all Cosmo's unscrupulousness he would never have introduced Fanny into his father's house.

"Perhaps you would like to know what Dolly said about you after you had left the dining-room. He said you 'were an enterprising little filly, but a man would have to take care of himself, by Jove, he would, if he was to get off cheap.' He said he was glad it was me, and not him. He is not very grammatical, you know, or perhaps you don't know. He went on to wonder how you'd got there, and believed Di would be asking Trottie de Vere next; he said it was wonderful what Di could do if she liked. 'And she had sat there looking scornful, like a queen, carrying it off before the servants, by Jove!' That Trottie de Vere manner of yours is rather misleading, you know. Diana begged me to take you away. I can't make out why you ever wanted to go there. You must have known you would be a fish out of water."

It was cruel. Nobody but Cosmo could have done it. For Fanny, as they walked away from the house, had been still exhilarated and sure of the impression she had made. As Cosmo spoke, her rage was like a wild beast within her, and one over which there was no control. Little flecks of colour came and went in her cheeks, and she let her beast speak, she was past reason.

"You don't know anything about it. She will ask me again and again. She is madly in love with Dennis, and wants him to divorce his wife. She wants to hear all I can tell her about Mabel and Roddy Ainsworth. Nobody but me can prove it."

He was contemptuous.

"My dear girl, Diana is as serious about Passiful as Haverford, or I, about you! It is the family tradition to be to a certain extent familiar with the lower orders. Passiful is by way of being something of a lady-killer, I believe, and it is possible my sister intends giving him a lesson. Nothing else is possible. You've made a thorough little fool of yourself this afternoon. Get back to Hampstead. Nurse

Amos, play with him, amuse him, that's about your best chance. He is in a soft mood."

"If Amos knew what Mabel was about he wouldn't leave her all that money."

"Oh! that is the idea, is it? Well, it is worthy of you! I thought the invention was for my sister's benefit. I see now you want to turn it to your own. It doesn't make it any less amazingly stupid. Don't plot, don't try to play the female villain of a penny novelette, you have not the brain for intrigue."

"Dennis will be glad enough of the opportunity of getting rid of Mabel. There is such a thing as evidence."

"False evidence. Yes, I know there is. And prosecution for perjury. But it is a silly game for you to try to play. You may like pickles, but you will find no flavour in skilly."

"It isn't false at all. They've been shut up together for hours and hours; no one else admitted. I can tell you when. I've got the dates, I remember them quite well. They have had hundreds of opportunities. . . ."

"You make me feel positively sick. What devils you women can be to each other. And she is really fond of you, I believe!"

Cosmo was really enraged, or he would hardly have been so candid. His annoyance was not perhaps with Fanny alone, but with Diana, for exposing herself to such a possibility as the one of which Fanny was talking. Cosmo really held the family honour dear, which was the most inconsistent thing about him. It was a great bore that Fanny was staying with Margaret; he wanted to tell Margaret all about it.

Before they got to the flat he asked Fanny how long she intended staying there.

"You are rather in Margaret's way, you know. The invitation was not indefinite."

"She can't turn me out." Fanny smiled. That Cosmo resented her presence there, perhaps Margaret too, made it exquisitely humorous that she should remain on. She had not recovered from the knouting she had had at Cosmo's hands, was still smarting, but the wild beast of her past rage had been suppressed; now she could think of reprisal. But again Cosmo was equal to the occasion. He took her to the door of the Berkeley Street flat, giving the last flick with the knout on the door-step.

"She can't turn you out, quite true, she admits that. But she can go away herself. As a matter of fact we are starting for the Riviera on Saturday; she is shutting up the flat."

"*Wel*" Fanny repeated it; the last flick had drawn blood, and she showed it plainly.

"You don't suppose I shall let her go alone, do you?" He raised his hat and was gone, leaving her standing on the door-step, with what feelings may be imagined.

CHAPTER XXIX

DIANA had some difficulty in getting rid of Dolly, who was first affectionate, and then plaintive, full of the way she treated him. But when she suggested that he might console himself with Mrs. Juxton he almost wept.

"But surely you were getting on very well?"

"You wouldn't look at me."

"So you looked at her?" He turned half sulky at her raillery.

"She is a dashed pretty little woman."

"That is just what I think, and of the chorus girl type. It will not be difficult for you to keep up to her conversational level."

"You're laughing at me."

"Laughing! I never was farther from it in my life. I'm completely serious. I think you would suit each other admirably. She has what I believe you men call a 'coming on' disposition. Your complaint of me is that I have not."

"You know, Di," he was almost solemn, the port had affected him and he had now a vague sense of injury, "you aren't behaving well to me, not at all well. You put me off, and put me off. . . ."

It could not be long now before Dennis came. Diana had told him she would be free in the afternoon.

"I shall put you off altogether one of these days," she said lightly. "Particularly if you pay such long visits." She put out her hand in farewell. He attempted a caress. She shook herself free with something more than impatience. She was hardly ready to burn her boats, and yet an embrace from him was an outrage to her in her present mood.

"Don't do that, you know how I hate it."

"I believe sometimes you hate me," he said, but as if it were impossible. It was another ten minutes before she had rid herself of him.

"I believe you women spend more than half your time with your dressmakers," was his parting shot.

"And how will you enjoy paying for the result?" was her cynical rejoinder. He came back to tell her that there was nothing he would not like to give her, and so made her remorseful. For although it was proverbial that Dolly was a little close, the settlements he had proposed were more than liberal. Custom made him less obnoxious to her than he was to most people. She could even afford to be sorry for him, whilst she waited for her lover, contrasting them in her mind.

Nothing Cosmo said had moved her. Neither the Gallery in Bond Street nor the cricket-field made Dennis Passiful anything but what she knew him. When he was not with her she counted the hours till their next meeting. To-day she had so much to tell him. Perhaps he did not know. As Cosmo said, husbands never know. Perhaps she would tell him. She had no definite intention; but she liked to think of him as free, and there for her acceptance.

He came in, not less attractive than she saw him in his absence, but more, and moving her always. He was not her lover, but she was in love with him. As for him, he was still seeking the middle course, to give her up, and yet to retain her. His manhood leapt to her, but there was something more than his manhood at stake. They met this afternoon as if he had never determined to give her up, never used that big word "renunciation," never remembered his duty to his wife, his *parole d'honneur*. They kissed and kissed again. All that he was conscious of momentarily was his desire for her hands and yielding lips, the slender form and nestling warmth of her, the murmur

in his ear, and cooing voice with its broken words. If a man be thirsty, water or wine to his hand, he must fain drink. He drank, and then again, of her lips. And he had to tell her that she was in his heart of hearts, for once, for always, that he would never forget what she had given, or offered, he was hers for ever and at all times to command. There *was* a bond between them, even if their lives must be lived separate.

When he had drunk of her lips, he moved away, to the mantelpiece.

They had so much in common, were such good companions. It was her mind he loved, so alert, and ready to meet his; her soul, so transparent through the radiant hazel of her eyes; her child heart, generous in giving and forgiving; her impulsiveness. He knew he could trust himself to take no advantage of these things; knew it all the time he was doubting it. Surely the spirit in him was stronger than the flesh; all his life's teaching could not have gone for nothing. He said something now, a little incoherently, about "playing the game." The phrase and his attitude made a shiver of doubt run through her. He was so different from all the men she had ever known; the gallant soldiers who had sought her favours. After he had got out that phrase he had been shocked at it himself, growing red and ashamed. It seemed to him all at once he had misunderstood everything; it was no trial of his strength that was coming. She could not care for him like that, it was not the way of women . . . his thoughts were incoherent as his words.

"Playing the game! What do you mean by playing the game?" she asked him. She made room again for him beside her on the sofa, as she had done the first night they had been here together. The thin lobe of her ear was prettier than anything he had ever seen, and it lay so near his lips.

"Is *that* 'playing the game'? she asked, and smiled into his eyes. He forgot for the next few minutes what it had meant. Then it was time for them to talk. She nestled to him, it was wonderful she should do that.

"You really do care for me?"

"Rather!" and she was sufficiently besotted with him at the moment to find the word eloquent.

"You will come and see me every day?"

"When I can."

"Whether you can or not."

It was lovely of her to want him.

"You know I am so awfully busy just now," he said awkwardly. After all there were certain things he must tell her. "My father-in-law depends upon me, and he has had a bad breakdown. Then there is my wife; there is Mabel. It is not as if I were a free man. . . ."

She played with the lapel of his coat, no one had ever done that to him before. It was difficult to keep his blood from rising, and the position clear.

"You *could* be free."

"Not a chance. I am bound, gagged, imprisoned." Margaret Lemon's words recurred, he was almost bitter.

"But would you be free if you could?"

"What do *you* think?" It was natural that his arm should be round her.

"Then you would have wanted to marry me?"

"Wouldn't I?" The arm tightened.

"Let us talk about it." She settled against him luxuriously.

They talked about it, playing the 'if' game. '*If*' he were free what would he say to her? He was not slow in saying it.

"And if I said 'Yes,' what would you do?"

She repulsed him gently when he would have shown her, and declared that what she meant was what would

he have said to her father? And then, more seriously, she spoke of what their future would have been. Family opposition to encounter, but no failure of courage on her part. She drew a picture, or a sketch, of their life together. Then they were at love's dalliance again.

"Oh Diana!" and "Darling!" and "If it could only be!" were things he said or sighed more than once.

That she would have taken him for her husband, wanted him for her husband, was wonderful. She could have been of use to him, she said. Politics was the only career for a rich man, and the moment had come when there was imperative call for a man to save the country, show where it was drifting, redeem it from the sordid Socialism for which the tactics of her father's party were responsible.

He was not without ambition, and she inspired it; hot blood, and she fired it. She was so lovely, vibrant, and so near him! On her lips the impossible became possible. Something might happen; they could wait. No two people had ever cared for each other like this. He did not stop to think what could happen, what must happen before such a thing could come to pass. What a marriage theirs would have been, a marriage of hearts and intellects. Such marriages take place now and again, surely, strengthening the whole foundations of the institution. If he had only been free. . . .

Then, quite gently but without doubt that she was justified, she began to talk to him about Mabel. She had not even as yet made up her mind what she should do when the natural consequence of her telling came about. It would, after all, be marrying out of her class. Her own world would be horrified. What Cosmo and her father would say she could not even contemplate. Notwithstanding what she had said to her father, she knew the advantages of the Haverford marriage. She had by no means made up her mind, but she wished to know his.

"You *could* be free; you could, of course, divorce your wife."

At first he was astonished, not believing his ears, incredulous that he had heard aright, thinking at first she meant that Mabel could divorce him. But she made it clear; she went on:

"It was Cosmo who first told me about it."

"Cosmo! What could he have told you? You must have misunderstood him. Mabel!" and when he spoke his wife's name he got up from the sofa. "You must have misunderstood him," he said again, agitatedly.

"But no. He said *you* knew nothing about it, that husbands never know." She repeated something Fanny had told her.

There was a flush upon his forehead, and every thought of Diana and her loveliness left his mind. *Mabel* — that Mabel's name should be used in this way, her reputation threatened! The heat in his blood was different now, and more generous. He was overwhelmed with sudden anger, or shame. That he should have to defend his wife to Diana! Shame, or stammering rage, overwhelmed him. Mabel's sheer goodness, the blamelessness of her unselfish days! It was he who had brought this upon her; he was ashamed.

When he could command his voice he began to tell Diana something of what Mabel was. He did not want to speak of her here and now, but he had to make Diana understand. He was exasperated when he found he could not easily or quickly make her understand. She either would not, or could not, see that such a charge was incredible, impossible. She repeated what Cosmo had said, that "husbands never knew," she brought forth some of Fanny's evidence, not as if Fanny had given it to her, but as if she had heard it from various and outside sources, as if it were well known, incontrovertible.

"She made her father take a theatre for him, put on his play."

"But I assure you . . ." his voice failed, for he had no words strong enough to use. The blood was beating in his ears, and confusing his head, not his faith nor his judgment, but his capacity of expressing them.

When Diana saw that he was really overwhelmed by what she had told him, completely ignorant, and unwilling to believe, she felt a chill of premonition, she felt as if her own supremacy with him was in jeopardy.

"You will not believe anything against your wife," she said passionately. "You think she is so much better than I am. *She* would never have a lover." She broke down, the tears in her eyes and voice brought his reluctant feet back to her.

"It is not that at all. I wish I could make you know how I think of you. But you must understand how impossible this story is about my wife; I *must* make you understand." "*My wife!*" — he said the words again and was conscious of the tenderness in his heart: "My wife is the most loyal, gentle, faithful. . . ." He could not go on.

"You care for her more than you do for me."

He was quick in contradiction, but amazingly and suddenly uncertain of the nature of his own feelings. He could not hear Mabel maligned, he found it unbearable. Before he recognised his change of mood Diana's lovely face was turned swiftly towards him, her radiant eyes soft and humid.

"That is not true . . . I know it is not true. But I cannot bear to hear you defend her. We won't talk of it any more. We will talk again about ourselves, about what we would have done if it could have been true. You like talking of that, don't you? Let us play, let us pretend. Where should we have gone for our honeymoon?"

She put forth all her powers, and they were not few. The appeal of her love, the appeal of her beauty and femininity, were brought to bear. She would sit through all love's feast with him, a feast of which he hardly knew more than the name. He knew this, she made him know it. But the very folly and madness of it, and her abandonment, caught him, and for a moment he went mad too, and his convictions, conscience, early teaching were shifting sand before the waves she spent upon him.

It was true that love was everything, the institution of marriage nothing. And then she murmured again of what marriage between them would mean; such a marriage as had never been known; they would be lovers, and companions. She said here a word, and there a word, that inflamed him, said them in his ear as she leant against him. She had been a wife, knew men and how to arouse them. His defence of his wife, and some coldness she had perhaps always felt in him, made her reckless. She *wanted* to be his wife, to "lie upon his heart." This was among the things she said. It was when he was aflame, outside himself, and beyond reason, she asked him again:

"Would you be free if you could?" And at that moment he thought that freedom was his greatest need.

"You know I would."

She panted against him, her lips on his ear, and her scented hair against his cheek; he felt the quiver of her.

"You could, you could."

She whispered to him, that it was only because she had *known* that his wife had a lover, that he was morally, if no other way, free, that she had been as she had with him. He felt her whole soul in this avowal, but he felt too the warmth that surged through her as she made it. He did not know how he could persuade her that she had been deceived. Then he heard her story of how people had been refused admission in Hamilton Terrace, how his wife and

the actor had sat hour after hour in the studio, no one allowed to break in upon them. He listened, but in listening, revolted. Only in his mind. His body, weakening, was conscious of a wish that it were true, a vague, rootless wish. He wanted to be free from his *parole d'honneur*, if only to-day, for this one afternoon. She went on; another story or two of Fanny's came back to her, and she repeated them. They would bear different interpretations, Dennis said. He begged her to discontinue the subject, put it away from her. He had to defend Mabel, but was agitated over it, for it was against himself he was defending her, and it was of this defence he was full as the spell of Diana's nearness deepened. It seemed so difficult to convey Mabel to Diana without disparaging her. Mabel was not the woman for amorous dalliance . . . he had not known how he should say this. So he held Diana close to him, and said nothing.

"Because you don't believe that what I have told you is true, it does not mean that it is false. And even if, if it isn't *all* true, it is true enough for the law. . . ."

"Oh! Hush! hush! I can't bear this. . . ."

"Can't bear me against you?" She cooed it, and in an instant his answer was hot on her lips.

"What does it matter how true it is?" she went on, when he allowed her to speak, for by now she was beginning to be dissatisfied with his lack of response. "There is corroboration, quite enough to free you."

"But Mabel is the best woman in the world, the most loyal, faithful, unselfish . . ."

That was in his mind, but he could not say it. He was ashamed that he could not say it.

"If one of us must be sacrificed, is it to be me?"

This was after another interlude in which he forgot Mabel, himself, everything, except that he had never before held a beautiful woman in his arms, and heard her pleading to him.

There were even tears in her voice when she pleaded. She loved him then, she loved him, it was impossible to let her go.

"You will act as if you believe it true?" she asked him again. "We can be everything, everything to each other, when you are free." She was bewildering and beautifully ashamed of what more she would give him when he was free, hiding her face against him. He could not bear to see her pride so abased, promising her in a breath, all, everything she asked; he would live only for her.

After all Roddy *might* care for Mabel, Mabel *might* be willing . . . but the wild thought had passed almost before it had come.

It was when they were both cooler, when it was really time for him to go, that he was conscious how she had understood, or misunderstood him. She asked him when he would be seeing his lawyer, and it was as a douche of cold water. She said that she was sure there was enough evidence against Mabel to convince a jury!

He was not out of the house before Mabel's image had displaced her own. Whatever were his feelings for Diana, and they had left him momentarily without a guard, they could not make him think this a possible way to gain her. Mabel needed no defence, yet at the very moment when, torn with desire, and new to its strength, he had become aware that she was being attacked, it was borne in upon him overwhelmingly how secure she was in the stronghold of his heart.

And at the end of the interview, when Diana had said that he should anyway act as if he believed the story were true, the spell of his enthralment was broken. He hardly realised it yet, for a man is slow to realise that his first passion is not his last, and that it can be scotched so easily. But he knew that he would defend his wife.

CHAPTER XXX

AND if he had been unsure before, Mabel herself would that night have convinced him.

He had steadied down before he got home, it was a purely physical emotion that had shaken him, and the hold weakened as he walked. His conscience had reproached him before this, but he had not before felt degraded by what he was doing. Before this afternoon Diana had been a goddess, an inspiration, something higher than himself, to which he aspired, and lay earthbound from its attainment. No manifestation of her love for him would have altered this attitude. That it was altered was due to another cause. He believed he had convinced her that Mabel was incapable of the conduct attributed to her; he had no difficulty now in tracing the whole story to Fanny. He remembered the scene in the library, the words she had spoken.

But having, as he thought, convinced Diana of its untruth, she had still persisted that he should act as if he believed it! It was not possible for Dennis Passiful to love a woman whom he could no longer respect, nor to become enmeshed in a passion that had not love to enrich it. Diana's hold had weakened, weakened irrevocably, although as yet he hardly knew it himself, and had still to suffer. Emotion, that nervous and excitable horse, could never now leap the barrier of his conscience; already it had bucked, and nearly thrown him. Now it was broken-winded.

She had talked of evidence, *evidence* against Mabel, whom he had sworn to cherish and protect, whom he knew to be innocency itself. Diana had said: "someone must be sacri-

ficed." But why should it be Mabel? He knew quite well that this thing asked of him he could never do.

First he would have to settle with Fanny, shut her venomous mouth. If necessary, he must appeal to Amos.

It was unfortunate that he should have sought Fanny so soon after that castigation she had received at Cosmo's hands, but he knew he would have been unable to sleep that night if he had made no effort on Mabel's behalf, or let the lying story have another hour's unchecked growth.

Fanny, fresh from Cosmo's announcement that he was leaving for the Riviera with Margaret Lemon, had been unable to restrain herself from challenging Margaret. And the stormy interview, stormy on Fanny's side, but very cool and amused on that of Margaret, had ended in Fanny's packing up, and removing to an adjacent hotel. There Dennis found her, barely an hour after her departure from the flat. But even that hour had been fruitful of mischief. It was strange that it was not against Margaret her anger was directed. Nor quite against Cosmo. Her vanity was so colossal, the thickness of her moral skin so great, that she could not really believe Cosmo meant to break away from her completely. She was most bitter about Mabel, of whom everybody spoke so well, who would inherit Amos's millions, who was thought such a saint by Dennis and Cosmo and everybody, although she spent hours alone with a man, a man of whom she was admittedly fond. Fanny thought she still had Amos's ear, and that she would be able to influence him. She intended to show Cosmo her power. If Amos knew what the world was saying about Mabel and the leading tenor, he would shut the theatre. The scandal *might* spread to Cosmo's sister. It was all in her hands, in Fanny's hands; she would show Cosmo what she could do if he drove her to it.

She had not even gone up to see her room, but had directed that the trunks should be taken up, whilst she went into the

library and dashed off her letter. Fanny's handwriting was large, straggling, and unformed, an uneducated writing, but good enough for mischief.

"DEAR LADY DIANA,

I've made up my mind that Mr. Juxton ought to know about his daughter, and I'm going to tell him. Then D. will *have* to take action. You know I'm your friend in this matter. Something ought to be done to stop the scandal. He was with her, as you know, all yesterday afternoon — it can't go on. I'm staying here a few days. If you care to come round and see me, I could tell you more. I shall be alone all this evening."

The letter had gone before Dennis came to the hotel, to which he had been directed from the flat. When Fanny heard that he had come and was waiting in the drawing-room to see her, her heart bounded, she felt this was the first-fruits of her letter. They knew that they could not do without her. She would tell Dennis she had not really made up her mind whether or not she would enlighten Amos, and furnish him with the necessary proofs. She would keep Dennis in suspense; he was not going to get his freedom easily, he would have to beg her for her evidence, abase himself. The prospect of Dennis abasing himself attracted her immensely. He had given himself superior airs. She would "show him."

What she had expected to show him will never be known; if it was herself, her real self, it would have been an ugly sight. But the whole interview went so differently from what she expected, and if she had illusion after it of Dennis's opinion of her she must indeed have been hard to convince.

"You have been telling lies about my wife," he began. Fanny was startled into answering:

"I don't know what you are talking about."

"Yes, you do, thoroughly. I am not going to waste time upon you. I am going straight up to Amos, but I thought I would give you warning."

"Up to Amos!" That took the wind out of her sails, made her lean forward, a little breathlessly. "But he's ill."

"He is well enough to hear what I have to say. I have been quiet about you too long; he still thinks you are everything you ought to be. I intend to open his eyes."

"I don't care what you tell him, he'll believe me before you."

"Will he? We shall soon find that out. I *should* like to know why you have attacked Mabel. I should have thought the commonest gratitude would have kept you honest and loyal to her, anyway. But there is neither honesty nor loyalty in you, and so I intend to show you up. How dare you lie about my wife?"

Dennis was still excited, his feelings conflicting. But Amos was the head of the family, and Amos must be told of the story that was going about. He had felt it right to see Fanny first; to hear her defence, if she had a defence. Fanny's defence now was to insist on the truth of her allegations, to bring chapter and verse to prove them! It was only when she brought in the name of Lady Diana that he refused to listen any longer. Amos should decide between them, he said. He turned on his heel, and left her alone in the dull drawing-room of the little hotel. For himself he never wanted to see her face again, nor did he intend that Mabel should. It had brought nothing but evil amongst them. He hardly trusted himself to say what he thought. But he did say that Ted's neglected illness had never been explained. Then he went away, he meant to see Amos before he saw Mabel.

He had forgotten Amos might be inaccessible, surrounded as he was by the pomp and circumstance of illness, by nurses and the authority of doctors. Fanny had not forgotten.

On the telephone, long before Dennis could get up to Hampstead, and indeed his resolution cooled on the way, Fanny had asked to speak to the nurse, had warned her Mr. Passiful was on his way to the house with disquieting news, had shown a hypocritical but intense anxiety lest the invalid should be disturbed. Fanny received complete reassurance that as far as that evening was concerned she need not fear that any plans she had made would be forestalled. She heard that Amos had already gone to bed, "been settled up for the night," was the nurse's phrase. The nurse said that Dr. Lauder's very last words were that Mr. Juxton was not to be troubled about business, or anything, he was to take a complete rest. His speech had been very incoherent again this evening, there had been so many callers. Dr. Lauder wished him to see no one but the doctors and nurses for a few days.

Fanny hung up the telephone with a sigh of relief. With a little care she did not doubt that she would be able to tell her story before Dennis could tell his. She had always been able to twist Amos round the little yellow finger of her cruel hand, and in his weak state she did not doubt that she would be able to convince him.

She spent all that evening expecting Lady Diana, but spent it fruitlessly. Diana, thinking her letter an impertinence, had torn it up, and consigned it to the flames. The matter was now in Dennis's hands, and she had little doubt as to the result.

Dennis, because his anger was somewhat cooled, was not sorry to learn at Fitzjohn's Hall that Amos was unable to see him that night, and might be unable to see him for some days. As he thought it over, and there is a long time for thinking things over between Dover Street and Fitzjohn's Avenue, it seemed a pity to disturb Amos; at least just yet, when he was already in a nervous and excitable state. He believed Fanny was the sole originator of the story, and that he had

frightened Fanny sufficiently for her to stop repeating it. No, what he had to do, and without delay, was to contradict the impression he had left on Diana's mind, the impression that he had yielded to what she asked him. Even now he could hardly believe she had asked it of him.

His own house was in darkness when he got there. Mabel had come home and had gone to bed, having been up all the night before. Amos was sufficiently exacting. Dennis had the time before him in which to write his letter to Diana. It must be a letter, he could not trust himself to another interview; not knowing, yet, that the spell was broken. He dined alone, phrases joined themselves, dissolved again, as he smoked after dinner. He put it off as long as possible, smoking one pipe after another, but at last he could put it off no longer, and he rose and went into the library, banging the door behind him, in a way a man has when his mind is perturbed, and he hates the task before him.

There was no fire in the library, and it was very cold. The ink in the pot had stagnated, and the pen broke in his hands.

"Dear, it can never be. . . ."

That was a rotten beginning, and was thrown into the waste-paper basket.

> "All your sweetness, your goodness to me cannot prevent my saying that only a blackguard could do such a thing as you suggest. . . ."

This was no better, it was worse, it put all the blame upon her. It followed the other to the waste-paper basket. Then there came a moment for reflection; Diana's smiling face rose before him, again he felt the soft cling of her lips, as a bee to a flower, and it set him aflame again. Now he bent to his task more resolutely.

"I don't know what you'll think of me. That story you heard is a cruel lie, and one I've got to fight. I couldn't range myself against my wife, I'm on her side, for all time. Forgive me, I don't know what came over me this afternoon. Yes, I do, and I'm horribly ashamed of it. I want to say good-bye in this letter; it seems awful after all your goodness to me. You'll think me a prig . . ."

He tore that up too. Perhaps he was a prig, and a fool! That "other fellows'" view presented itself as, albeit unwittingly, the scent and softness of her came back. Mabel *had* been fond of Roddy, she had admitted as much. Roddy had not returned her affection, he had gone to Australia. But who was to say that, when he came back, and with Amos's money to tempt him, any amount of opportunities, his own absence, and indifference, who was to say . . .?

"Is that you, Dennis?" The interruption startled him; he dropped the empty pen.

"Oh dear, I'm afraid I startled you! I heard the door go . . ."

He did not answer. She could not understand why he was looking at her like this, but she felt there was something strange about him, and that the atmosphere was tense. She faltered out:

"Why are you looking at me so strangely?"

Dennis had left Diana in all the lace and softness of her clinging gown, gossamer and revealing. A strand of her hair had come unbound, been scented and sweet against his lips where still throbbed the pressure of hers. Mabel was in her plain blue flannel dressing-gown, it half concealed and half revealed a cambric nightgown; her feet were in slippers. Mabel's hair was brown and luxuriant, hanging now in two thick plaits. Her eyes were blue and tired, but she looked younger than her years. A man might easily have taken

advantage . . . he knew, none better, what beasts men were.

Quite abruptly, without preliminary or any explanation, without rising, he said:

"Do you and Roddy Ainsworth kiss each other? I suppose he makes love to you. You are alone together for hours. . . ."

Mabel flushed painfully. Dully he saw that even the slender uncovered throat was suffused; it was as if he had struck her. And, but still dully, he was ashamed and sorry for what he was saying, and knew that he would be sorrier. She did not speak, in truth she could not, so startled was she and overwhelmed; and he repeated more roughly, almost brutally, because she moved his tenderness, and he did not want to be moved by her:

"Why don't you answer? Don't try and get out of it."

"I don't know what has come over you," she stammered out.

"That is all very well, but it is not me we are talking about, it's you. *Does* he kiss you? I've heard something . . ."

She was bewildered and hurt, hurt almost beyond speech. Never had he spoken to her like this, never, in all their married life, that married life that had been without quarrel, almost without a difference of opinion. It was difficult to answer him in a moment when he spoke to her like this. Something of dignity came to her; she turned, without a word, to go out of the room. He was on his feet in a moment, and put himself between her and the door.

"I want to know all about it; I insist upon being told."

"Are you quite yourself, Dennis?" Her tone was very quiet, the dignity still about her, but the colour had not ebbed from her face and neck.

"I'm damned if I know . . ." his voice was harsh.

He had seen there were tears in her eyes. He was not

sure, not sure about anything; his anger tailed off suddenly. He only knew that he was acting like a fool and a brute, and that Mabel was as incapable of evil as she was of guile.

But those few words and the tone of them, his admission that he was not sure of himself, changed the situation between them in an instant.

"I knew you were not feeling well. I knew it when I came in, and you looked at me so strangely." Now she was all tremulous solicitude. "It is all my fault, it was so careless of me not to remember to tell Mary to keep the fire up. This room is cold, there ought to have been a fire in it. Do come upstairs. Let me get you a little whisky and water, hot with sugar in it. I have often mixed it for father, it won't take a minute to boil a kettle. Oh, Dennis, what a fright you gave me! I thought you were angry with me about something. I couldn't think what you meant."

She took it for granted now that he was only feeling ill. She would have gone away to get together the things that she thought he needed, but that he was still between her and the door.

This was Mabel, whose good faith he was supposed to doubt, whose honour he was asked to attack! If his speech was still rough and unaccustomed, there was no longer anything in it to hurt her.

"I'm sorry I spoke so roughly. I don't want anything, I'm not ill." Now he moved away. "Go up to bed, and leave me to myself, there's a good girl. I'm not ill, only worried. I oughtn't to have spoken to you like that, my nerves tricked me. I didn't know I had any nerves, but I've been so short of exercise these last few days . . ."

"I was sure it was that, but do let me stay, I'm sure I can help. I'll light the fire, I know where to find the wood and paper. Oh dear, what a lot of letters you seem to have been writing!"

Her eyes, in search of material for the fire, had fallen upon

the filled waste-paper basket, the writing-table littered with half filled sheets of paper.

"I've got an important letter to write, a letter I must get off to-night. Don't bother about the fire, I shan't be very long now."

"But ought you to sit in the cold, to work so late?"

Her solicitude made him flush with shame, a slow and sullen flush. The letter had got to be written, there could be no sleep for him until it was done.

It is possible some vague glimmer of the truth came to her, she may have seen the superscription on an envelope, known that it was to a woman to whom her husband was writing. Certainly that dull red came into her cheeks again; he saw it, but almost before he had time to wonder at its genesis, she had turned and left him, closing the door gently behind her.

"Don't be long, then," were the words she left behind her, she was still thinking that the room was cold for him.

Dennis dashed off his note feverishly when she had gone. After all, there was no use trying to put it delicately, it had got to be said.

"DEAR LADY DIANA,

I feel a brute for telling you that I can't see you any more. I can't trust myself, that's the truth. And it's not playing the game to my wife, or any of my people, or to you, if it comes to that. I'm not free, not free in any sense of the word. Mabel, my wife, is as good as gold, she doesn't deserve I should deceive her. And as for the other thing that we spoke of, it isn't to be spoken of, a stupid dastardly lie. You possibly heard it from or through Mrs. Ted Juxton, it could only come from a woman without any decency of feeling. Mabel has been a good and true friend of hers. But this is not what you want to hear from me, only it is late, and I can't

stop to write this all over again. I want to go on and tell you what I think about you, how adorable and beautiful you are, how good you have been to me. Some other fellow . . . but I can't think of you and any other fellow. If I wrote half I'm thinking, and feeling, you wouldn't believe I'm going to give you up. I know I've got an awful time before me. I don't know how I'm going to get through. Let me do something for you now and again. It's the one ray of comfort I've got to help myself with, that perhaps I have been of a little use to you. . . ."

It was difficult to express that he wanted her still to look upon him as her banker.

"Don't let anyone ever bother you. You've been so awfully good to me, shown me a whole new world, I can't even trust myself to go on writing."

He felt himself weakening as he wrote; and ended up abruptly:

"I shan't ever forget you, be sure of that. God bless you. Good-bye, I could never say it, it's difficult enough to write. Good-bye, good-bye, good-bye!"

He affixed his name hurriedly, thrusting what he had written into the envelope without reading it over. He was going out himself to post it. He would trust nothing to chance. She would get it by the first post in the morning. Then she would understand. As for himself, he had got to get through his days.

* * * * * * *

Mabel, from her own front bedroom, watched him go out with the letter in his hand. She had naturally the best bed-

room in the house, large and bow-windowed. A fire burned luxuriously on the hearth, and on the big double bed were heaped down pillows and eider-down. This had been the room to which they had come after their honeymoon in Bournemouth, their wedding chamber. She began to tremble when she remembered it. It was two years now since he had shared it with her. There had been no quarrel between them, there had never been a quarrel between them. Only she had had neuralgia, and feared an open window, Dennis didn't care for an eider-down. Such little things had led them to see the advantage of separate sleeping rooms. How strange he had been to her to-night, unkind, and the letter he was writing had been to a woman. Men had so many temptations. The red flushed into her cheeks again, she found herself suddenly hot all over, and trembling. He had never said an unkind word to her before to-night. He had not meant them, he said it was only his nerves. Now her conscience, it was quite as sensitive as his, began to speak. Had she been a good wife to him, a good wife, such as he deserved, such as he ought to have? There was her neuralgia. . . .

Mabel had been five years a wife, but about her still, and would be always, was something maidenly, reluctant. When she asked herself if she had made Dennis a good wife she felt very hot, and suddenly distressed. She was delicately minded . . . the heat, the flush, came again, although she was in the solitude of her own room.

They had been a long time separated. Men were . . . men were so different from women. Ought she to . . . to say anything to him? He may have felt something missing in his married life . . . might have . . . the flush was painful, and burnt her. He may have needed her . . . he was so considerate. . . .

When her thoughts had taken her so far as this, her feet, too, had moved. had carried her to the locked door of her

room. He had asked her about Roddy. Had some retrospective jealousy assailed, or stung him? Then it was in all her confusion of mind, and desperate shrinking, that something of joy suffused her. She had never doubted that Dennis cared for her, but sometimes, lately, she had thought he had been reserved, irritable. The poor thing had so little to guide her, knew so little of her husband, of men and their needs. Her ignorance flooded her. But, if it was that . . . she must go to him.

It was as difficult for her to go from her room to his, with the thought she had in her mind, as it would have been five years ago. To believe it one must enter more into her heart, know more of their lives together than these pages have perhaps shown.

* * * * * * *

Dennis had come in from posting his letter. That page in his life was turned down, closed, finished. He still mistrusted himself. Already he was arguing that Diana could not have known the impossibility of Fanny's story being true, or she would not have asked him to act upon it. She was too good, altogether too good. But when he thought of her goodness, it was of her surrender he was thinking, and how wonderful it was when a woman surrendered herself to a man, how grateful he should be . . .

He had come in from posting his letter, and had started undressing, a little savagely, untidily perhaps, throwing his things here and there. He opened the door to fling out his boots. Mabel was at the door; Mabel! her hand on the latch.

"I thought I heard you come up." She seemed half ashamed of being caught there, confused and hesitating.

"Do you want anything? Come in."

"I . . . I wanted to speak to you."

He could see that her colour was coming and going, she seemed extraordinarily nervous. He could not imagine what

she wanted to say to him, he had actually forgotten what had occurred between them downstairs, he only knew he had been irritable with her. In his socks, without a collar, for he had got that far in his undressing, he was really a fine upstanding man. Mabel did not notice the width of his shoulders, set of his head, lean grace of his movements. Diana would have known of it, or Fanny. But Mabel only knew there was something she must say to him, and that she did not wish to say it. He made her come in and sit down, he saw that from some cause or another, it may have been the cold, she was shaking, and her manner timorous. He asked her if there was anything the matter.

She began quite abruptly:

I wanted to tell you—I thought I . . . I . . . we . . ." What she got out was not exactly what she had come to tell him, but it was dreadfully difficult to speak at all.

"You asked me about Roddy and . . . and kissing me." It was painful to see the flush on her thin cheeks, and how it even suffused her eyes. "Roddy kissed me on my birthday, the day I was twenty-one; he brought me a bunch of violets, too, they were Neapolitan ones, so sweet. I suppose that was the beginning of it, of all my foolishness."

It pained her to say this, to repeat upon how little she had built her romance.

"I thought you knew; I told you that evening in the cab, don't you remember? He kissed me once again, on the day he went to Australia; he said I had helped him a great deal. That is what you wanted to know, what you asked me downstairs. You are not angry with me now, are you?"

She stopped short, and now she heard the beating of her own gentle heart.

"I couldn't give a thought to anyone else after we were married. You couldn't think that I would, could you, after . . . after everything? Perhaps it is that. . . ." She was uncertain how to say to him that which she had

come to say; it was such a dreadful thing to utter, or suggest. "I do hope you are not still feeling ill," she finished lamely, looking away from him.

"I'm beastly sorry I spoke, don't think any more about it, it wasn't anything."

Her embarrassment seemed to spread to him.

"But, oh, if you really minded!"

"Not a bit. As you say, I knew all about it. Poor old girl! But Ted's death has knocked me about, and your father's illness. . . . I'm not myself to-night. I don't know what came over me, you mustn't think any more about it." He had stopped in his undressing, now he sat down upon the bed, and tried to get to ordinary topics. He asked what had happened at Fitzjohn's Avenue after he left, how Amos had been all day, what Lauder said. He wanted chiefly to get rid of that feeling of embarrassment, he did not know the cause of it, he was not used to being embarrassed with Mabel.

She followed his lead gladly, and told him all the day's news. It was only when he began to yawn, and say he supposed he'd best be going to bed now, that she gathered her courage together again; he was struck by the wave of colour that he saw on her forehead, and reddening cheeks.

"If you would like . . . don't you think it would be better . . ." Literally she could hardly speak.

"My room is so much larger than yours; perhaps if you are not well . . ."

He understood, to his credit be it said that he understood at once. And was moved, moved out of all proportion to what she had said. Now he understood her colour, her confusion, the trembling of her limbs. He was absolutely silent, he could not answer, but he was inexpressibly touched.

All at once, he felt himself to be a 'bounder,' a 'rotter.' He had been sitting on the bed, now he stretched himself

full length upon it, his face, ashamed, was turned toward the wall. He lay there a moment, the silence unbroken.

"I only thought . . ."

"Don't, dear, don't." He had an immense longing to unburden himself, to tell her how it had been with him; but greater still was his desire that she should never know or guess. Then there followed an hysterical inclination to laugh — "there stood the champagne, but he tasted it not" — and the need of Diana's quick comprehension to laugh with him. But more poignant than all, a comprehension of what it meant to Mabel to say so much, and the certainty that he must help her. He got up from the bed, presently, went over to her, kissed her. He even said:

"Poor Mabel! dear old girl!" and put his arm about her.

He could not take what she offered him, not to-night. But he said a word or two that made the tears come, happy tears; he really understood what this had cost her; he took her in his arms to kiss her, saying: "All right, old girl," and "I understand," "Bravo," and other foolish inconsequent phrases. "Another day. I'm so awfully out of sorts . . ."

It was not until he was alone, reviewing the incident, still uncomfortable over it and ashamed, that he began to know there was finer stuff in the way Mabel had come to him than in all the wonderful surrender Diana had offered.

It was then, too, but very dimly and as it were from a long way off, he began to see, or to suspect, that Margaret Lemon had been wrong in her statement that marriage was imprisonment. It *was* imprisonment . . . for malefactors. For others, himself for instance, it might well be freedom . . . the way out!

Once he had begun to think this way, the upshot was not in doubt, although it might be some time in coming. Dennis Passiful could never love a woman who failed to keep his respect, although that which was weak in him, and

from the temptation of which he had always prayed to be delivered, still knew that she was lovely and desirable.

But the way Mabel had come to him was so different. It was his release she had brought him, although as yet it was obscured to him.

CHAPTER XXXI

LADY DIANA did not accept Dennis's letter as final, which was perhaps not strange. As a matter of fact it stimulated her to fresh effort when her first anger had evaporated. For of course she was angry, very angry. In that first rush of it she remembered she had condescended, that Dennis was not her equal, that had he been he would never have written such a letter. Men did not do such things in her world.

She did not reply to it for three days, during which Dennis's spirits rose mercurially; his conscience lightened, and he felt that he had not done anything so very wrong after all. Fanny, too, apparently, was in a better mind as regards Amos, that potentate remaining in ignorance of the storm that threatened his family while he took the immense and practical care of himself that his position demanded.

And Fanny was occupied; there was no hurry about making mischief between Amos and his daughter. What was urgent was to get Cosmo back, to prevent him from going abroad with Margaret Lemon.

Lady Diana had never even answered her letter, Diana had a trick of not answering letters at the moment. Fanny thought she did not deserve helping. Fanny hated her and everybody, concerning herself in nothing but in getting Cosmo back.

Cosmo, quite aware that he had been harsh, and more content now he had not to encounter Fanny in Margaret's flat, responded somewhat to the flag of peace that was being waved to him. He visited Fanny in her hotel; he postponed the journey to the Riviera. It was a waiting time

with all of them. Cosmo meant to have his play produced at the Kemble. The trump card he held was the knighthood, his father had promised to use his influence. Amos would not throw over the man who brought him the first intelligence, who would hold out to him the hope that this honour was only an earnest of what was to follow. Cosmo would have no scruples in hinting at a baronetcy.

The first incident that disturbed the comparative peace into which they had fallen was Diana's belated reply to Dennis's letter. He found it waiting for him when he came to Bond Street, on the fourth day after he had written it. It was very short, and said she "could give him ten minutes if he looked in that afternoon." That was all it said. It ignored his letter, it was as if, with her at least, everything was as it had been between them before he wrote. He was puzzled and agitated by it, and found it difficult to answer.

Before he had made up his mind what to say in answer, the telephone rang; and it was her own voice in his ear.

"Is that you? Don't come this afternoon, come this evening. I shan't be able to get rid of Dolly until too late. Are you all right?"

Dennis was taken by surprise, had no answer ready; she understood that he would come.

It was fully an hour before he had made up his mind what to do. To write again that he dared not trust himself was preposterous. He temporised with a short note saying he had promised "to take his wife to the theatre that evening, and could not disappoint her."

Mabel was delighted to come down to him, when he telephoned her later. She would bring his suit bag, they could dine in the West End, it was quite a jaunt. Then she wavered, and said something about it being so soon after Ted's death. He said "Macbeth" was the play he had in his mind, and of course the deepest mourning permitted Shakespeare.

Mabel and Dennis were getting closer in these days, he seemed to understand her better than he had done, and to find something strangely satisfying in the knowledge. She made no demands upon him, yet depended on his kindness. He had asked her not to see Fanny, not to go out and about with Fanny, nor to press him for an explanation. She pleaded Fanny's loneliness, but yielded almost without argument. Fortunately her obedience had not been put to the test. Fanny, as we know, was occupied.

Diana, who had been angry before, was furious now. At first she took comfort at the thought that he could not trust himself to an interview; and upon an interview she determined. There were more letters, upbraiding: yet these were easy to answer; plaintive, these were, however, more difficult. There *was* an interview. But it took a different tone from what either of them had foreseen, or intended. She had meant to allure him, and it was against that he had steeled himself. But, instead, she attacked Mabel, to whom she said she was being sacrificed. He could not bear the attack on Mabel, something was different in their relations, and his tenderness for her had increased.

Diana was very beautiful; she had dressed for him this afternoon, and everything about her heightened it. But when she spoke of Mabel he hardly saw her beauty. It was then he first became definitely aware that her hold on his imagination was loosened. Mabel was there before her, with the appeal of her confidence in him, his knowledge that although she was his wife, it was she who gave more than Diana offered, more for her, he meant; a delicate distinction, but he had become aware of it. To be faithful to Mabel was all the teaching, and now it had suddenly become all the desire, of his manhood.

A psychologist might have said that Dennis was a man of feeling, but not a man of passion. He had it in him now to wish he had never met Diana; resenting what she had

aroused in him. He was, after all, satisfied with his married life, and began to think his choice of Mabel had been deliberate. He found something curiously analogous in their temperaments. What might be called her prudery had become a greater attraction than Diana's fire, would prove a greater permanent attraction, he knew. He was not built for an ardent lover, a hero of romance.

Nevertheless, and although he was so strong in his intention never again to be beguiled, Diana had the power to make him acutely uncomfortable. She found the way to do it, and exercised her knowledge. There was that question of her swollen banking account, she knew all about it now. She said that he had placed her under an obligation only to humiliate her! She said she "would never know a happy moment until she had repaid him." And of course he knew there was only one way in which she could accomplish it. Of course "if he had ever cared for her . . ."

He had to protest that he had really cared for her, that he did, and to plead his duty to his wife. But she laughed at that scornfully. Why had he not thought of it before? He would not be trying to force her to marry Haverford, for that was what it came to. . . . She could not remain in his debt, there was no other way. . . . It was then he discovered that she was really not half as sensitive as Mabel, nor had she so delicate a mind. When a man's passion for a woman has cooled, it is wonderful how clear her faults become to him.

It was a wretched business altogether, her letters, telephone messages, the abasement of her pride, and her attacks upon him. He was growing exasperated and reckless with it, when Providence, that has a way sometimes of playing on the right side, intervened to put an end to it. He was sick of heart, entangled with conflicting emotions, many things weighed upon him. When she reproached him, he knew she had cause. When he said he was protecting

Mabel's happiness, he knew he was thinking something of his own.

He was horribly out of condition, this sort of thing was bound to put him out of condition. He had an athlete's way of looking at things, not heroic, perhaps, but natural. Neither Sandow's exerciser nor the weighing-chair reassured him. When he walked to Lord's this eventful morning on which Providence intervened, he was concerned about himself; the work he had done with the exerciser was ridiculous, and he had lost almost a pound since the beginning of the month. He wished he had kept clear of women! There must be a way out of the imbroglio in which he found himself, but he was hanged if he could find it. She bombarded him with letters; he could not be brutal to her. That question of the obligations under which he had laid her was really at the root of the trouble, he couldn't persuade her to let it slide. Seeing that it was the most valuable move she had made, she would not let his attention wander from it. He was really awfully sorry for her, and anxious to do the right thing.

At Lord's this morning he played his sett of tennis with the well-known professional whose stammering scoring contradicted his unswerving returns and brilliant service. He played him even, and only just managed to get home, after stretching himself to his utmost capacity. Then came the bath, and the momentary feeling of a new cleanliness, mental and physical, a sense that he was master of his fate, although he was not yet quite so certain of what that fate might be. He knew plenty of fellows who had ruined their lives for, or with, a woman. It was nearly as fatal as drink in the cricketing world. He was already wondering what was going to happen to him next season. As he dressed, although he felt so much better, and more like himself, he was all at sea as to the future, even the immediate future. He must see Diana some time to-day, for she insisted upon

giving him an I.O.U. It was infernally awkward, distressing; he didn't want the thing.

It was then that Providence intervened on his behalf in the shape of the Honourable John Tweed, who had heard that Dennis Passiful was in the dressing-room, just as he was writing a telegram to him. Dennis had word that Mr. Tweed wanted to see him, at once, urgently. Everyone knows the Honourable John Tweed, once Captain of England, now on the Selection Committee of Lord's, or, as some dissatisfied pressmen, who were also cricketers, put it, he *was* the Selection Committee, autocratic and dominant.

Dennis, when he had finished dressing and gulped down a soda and milk, obeyed the summons. He liked the Honourable John, and the Honourable John liked him. It was force of circumstances, and not the dominant member of the Selection Committee, that had kept Dennis out of the Gentlemen and Players the last two years. That a mistake had been made was evident when he made a 137, not out, for his county in the very last match of the year, and thus secured its honourable third place. This was the occasion when he had strained that ligament. Tweed had been very nice about it.

The Honourable John was waiting for him downstairs in that long, historic, many-windowed chamber, decorated with pictures dating from the first era of cricket, when the men played in top hats and peg-top trousers. Dennis had no eyes for the pictures, and no time if he had had the eyes. For the Honourable John was the picture of elderly distress, with a sheaf of letters and telegrams in his hands. It was with the uttermost lugubriousness he said to Dennis, as if the end of the world were in sight, and the darkness was already descending upon him:

"Small has thrown us over," these were the exact words, but "The mountain is in eruption, nothing can save the

country," was what the expression of his face seemed to convey. Dennis's face fell too.

"No! Chucked it? Good Heavens! What excuse does he give? Who will you get? What is to be done?"

"God knows! It's the eleventh hour. Something about his wife; I can't bother to read his letter. He wired yesterday, and I wired back; we've been doing nothing but wire. Now here is his letter:" he held it out. "You see, it's absolutely final!"

One regrets to chronicle that the Honourable John Tweed indulged in some very strong language, about women in general, and Small's wife in particular, about Small, and the baseness of his conduct. The whole tour was in jeopardy. The M.C.C. team that was going to S. Africa would be without a captain, without that showy head of affairs that had been practically promised to the S. African millionaire who had guaranteed the expenses, arranged the series of matches, backed his opinion that his adopted country would hold its own against a first class side. And everyone knows now that the S. African millionaire was right. The M.C.C. could not afford to send a second class man in Small's place.

"I've wired Larner and Lamb," he said gloomily, "but they've both declined. Besides; well, you know what happened last time!" It was not etiquette to do more than remember that the eminent bowler who had tried to bring the mythical ashes from Australia had developed an over-active thirst. "There is no choice, my dear fellow, no choice at all. *You* must go."

"I!" Dennis gasped.

There had, of course, in his early days, been talk of his going to Australia, and he would have liked the experience. But business stood in his way. The Honourable John knew, everybody knew, that Dennis Passiful had a business that robbed cricket of his unhampered services, that made it obligatory he should only be called upon when necessary.

He had more than once had serious thoughts of giving up first class cricket altogether; each season was to have been his last. The suggestion that he should go out to S. Africa in Small's place, captain the team, set him gasping, took away his breath. But it was very flattering, extraordinarily flattering. It was two years since he had been asked to play for the Gentlemen; there were always young men coming on, Oxford and Cambridge blues. There was ever a tinge of bitterness when he remembered that he had never played in a 'Varsity match.

"Impossible! There's Allgood, Hawkins, Lamb . . ."

"Neither of them could keep the team together. We want a popular man, a man they know. You will have to go; there's no choice. Good God! What's business?" He knew Dennis was going to plead business. "A nation of blasted shopkeepers, that's what we are. But you're a sportsman, Passiful, you can't leave us in this hole . . ." He was actually entreating him.

Dennis began to hesitate even whilst asserting that the thing was impossible. What a way out! What a breathing-time for him! It was a great compliment that was being paid him, even if it were being paid in this lugubrious way. He knew that, and also that it was the Honourable John's way. Neither Allgood nor Hawkins would do, he knew that as well as Tweed. Larner had refused, but no cricketer in the world could find fault with being placed second to Larner. It was true that Lamb was not the man for the job. He knew the list by heart of the men who were going. More than one of them might object to go under Lamb's leadership. They would not mind going under his; his heart beat high, he knew that he was popular in this world that he loved, where his best days had been passed.

It struck him suddenly that Amos had been ordered a sea voyage. Why should not that sea voyage be to S. Africa? It would simplify matters extraordinarily. Mabel could

come too. Why not? He remembered Warner had taken both wife and family to Australia. He was all at once tremendously taken with the idea, and excited. He thought of his condition; but had no doubt he would get back his muscle on board. As far as business was concerned, he could afford to take a holiday. Dolland was all right, Christie's were closed two months out of the three or four he would be away. He might miss something, but he would be back in plenty of time for the season.

All this was tumultuous in his mind whilst the one-time Captain of England implored and persuaded, and finally began to bully him into accepting. It would be "such a damned sporting thing to do." It would be "such a damned unsporting thing not to do," and so on.

Dennis, already sure that he would go, begged for twenty-four hours in which to decide. The Honourable John was all over smiles then, patting him on the back, and telling him that he was the very man for the job. Dennis stipulated for his twenty-four hours; but can hardly be said to have had fair play with them. Someone, and it is difficult to absolve the Honourable John, must have taken that suspended decision for granted, because, as with Amos's illness, it was in the papers before it had been announced. Dennis, almost before he had broken the news to Mr. Dolland, certainly before he had time to talk it over with Mabel or his father-in-law, read in an early edition of the Evening News: "*Passiful to Captain the Team for S. Africa. Satisfactory Selection.*" The editorial comment was really gratifying. Telegrams began to pour in upon him before he had left the office.

Immediately he left Lord's he had telephoned Mabel that he had been asked to go to S. Africa, in Small's place. And Mabel, realising it was a compliment that had been paid to him, and never thinking of herself in the matter, or whether she was going to be left behind exclaimed:

"How nice! I am so glad. Yes, I'll tell father, he's ever so much better. Go with you! Oh dear! I never thought of that. I should like it so much. Father too! Oh dear, wouldn't it be delightful! I'll ask him. Next week! Isn't that very soon? Do you want me to do anything about your clothes?"

He could leave the consideration of those for the present. There was so much to do. He hardly knew what to turn to first. It was all so hurried. There had been so many delays; the men, who were to have started earlier, had been detained by one cause or another until now. Now the passages were taken, the dates fixed up, and the inside of a week must see them off. The very first thing, of course, was to ascertain what berths were still vacant on the "Minotaur." If Amos was to go, there must be a state cabin; even then Amos was not the man to be hurried.

There was a state cabin to be had, and the other berths for which he inquired. But at the office of the great steamship company he was informed that he must make up his mind at once, there were so many inquiries, a waiting list. All the passages had been booked, but only an hour ago Sir Auld Fleetwood, for whom the best had been reserved, had cancelled the booking. Dennis hurriedly engaged them, risking Amos's refusal.

Early in the afternoon Mabel telephoned again. She had seen her father, and Dr. Lauder. Both of them had been pleased with the idea, and Dr. Lauder had sent his congratulations to Dennis. Father had not perhaps understood about it until then. But Dr. Lauder had told him it was a feather in Dennis's cap. Father wanted more time, but she thought perhaps that could be got over. Couldn't Dennis manage to see him this afternoon, or early in the evening, and explain? Dennis saw no difficulty in that. Before this second telephoning, Mabel had not thoroughly understood she was certainly to be of the party, and her

pleasure in the news was unbounded. She had made a quick tentative plan for taking Ursula and Agatha to Bournemouth. She thought that would have relieved Dennis's mind. But he wanted her with him, and it was almost overwhelming to her just now that Dennis wanted her to be with him. She said hurriedly that of course she could look after her father, guard them both from any eccentricities of what she had heard was "such a treacherous climate," see about flannel under-garments, quinine. Dennis felt her gladness through the telephone, it touched him, and strengthened her claim.

With all this telephoning and telegraphing in progress, and the news in the evening papers, it did not seem possible that Lady Diana should remain in ignorance of what was transpiring. It had not struck Dennis that she neither read the "Evening News," nor the "Cricketing Intelligence," in any paper. He had seen Amos and persuaded him, done a hundred necessary things; it was already Wednesday, and they sailed on Saturday, before she became aware of it.

It was Cosmo who told her then, Cosmo, who saw all his own plans thwarted, and his income seriously curtailed:

"But it's impossible, impossible," she told him, with heightened colour, when he asked her, at luncheon, if she knew that Dennis Passiful was off to S. Africa at the end of the week, bearing with him his invaluable father-in-law.

"It may be impossible, but it is nevertheless true. The notices went up a week ago. The Kemble shuts on Saturday, and with it my hopes of making a great playwright of Amos Juxton — Sir Amos Juxton — for at the very moment it is of least value to me, like all my father's gifts, I hear I may rely upon my patron, whom I patronise by the way, receiving his decoration. Decoration, damn him!" Cosmo was almost natural. "He goes away without a thought of what a loss it will be to me."

But it was not Amos's departure that drove the colour

from Diana's cheeks. She had had short hurried notes from Dennis, he had said he was overwhelmed with work; she "would understand." She had not understood, she had thought he was evading the question of that I.O.U. she was pressing upon him. She was still expecting his surrender, and now he was running away! That was how she put it to herself, he was running away!

Dolly came in, later in the day, quite full of it. He said he should go and see them off, he talked of Harrow, and "Willow the King," half-maddening Diana, who knew nothing about international cricket, and thought, perhaps not entirely without justification, the whole thing was a ruse of Dennis's to escape from the dilemma in which he found himself.

The note she dashed off to him, after Dolly had gone humming that preposterous song, was only one line:

"Is it true you are going to S. Africa?"

He thought it incredible that she had not heard it until then, and told her so. He had no choice, he said in his reply; which was perhaps begging the question, the question between him and her. "Small threw them over at the last moment. Larner refused. Allgood and Hawkins were impossible." Practically this was all his letter. He added that he was overwhelmed with work. One or another of the team had still to be seen; colours required attention.

It was true that he hardly knew which way to turn. Mr. Dolland was quite able to attend to the affairs of the Gallery, but was indefatigable in asking for instructions. Amos really wanted help, and keeping up to the programme. Dennis, somewhat remorseful, perhaps, added a postscript to his letter. "It is only for three or four months. I shall be back in the early spring."

That last line was the crowning insult. Did he really think she was going to wait three months for his return,

break her heart about him, perhaps, and then hear that he had decided to uphold his wife? She was in a white tumult of revulsion against him. She never wanted to see him again, nor to hear his name. This was what came of 'encouraging the lower orders.' One could imagine to what a pass she had come when she said this, even when she said it to herself and there was no one present to be hurt by it.

Dolly, Lord Haverford, could not believe his ears when she told him, with that languid indifference that he was used to from her, that if he were really so keen about marriage, he could announce the date of their wedding. He did not know what had come over her, but suspected she had heard that he had visited Fanny at her hotel. He was also bidden to put the announcement in the papers at once, Friday or Saturday at latest, or she might change her mind again. She had no explanation to offer, but said that it was not at all certain that she would not change her mind if it were not in the papers by Saturday.

Cosmo, on Saturday morning, when he read at the breakfast-table, in his "Morning Post" that "A marriage had been arranged and would take place shortly, etc.," smiled at her, and said:

"They'll get the morning papers before they sail."

But he was sorry he said it. For Diana was not in good looks this morning and something about her made him feel annoyed that Adolphus Haberton Wrensham, Lord Haverford, was what he was.

"There is one thing, when you are married you need not see much of him," he said consolingly, if inconsequently. "He is rickety too. If ever you enjoy a new widowhood, it will be a well provided one." She got up and left him. Cosmo was altogether too sharp-sighted; she did not want that note of sympathy in his voice.

If she had really thought that Dennis Passiful would read

the announcement of her forthcoming marriage before he sailed, read it and be distressed, she was in ignorance as to the meaning of such an enterprise as the one before him.

He had not had a moment to call his own since the decision was taken, and the last morning was the worst of all. He could never have got through it without Mabel, who charged herself with her father, and carried out her charge loyally. She had found time to arrange that the sisters should go to Bournemouth, although she was unable to accompany them. They were so used to her by this time, she was so much a daughter, or a sweet younger sister, to them, that they had no scruples in availing themselves of her kindness. She had taken a small house for them, in the pine-woods. They would go. Ursula had a little cough, her usual winter cough, Agatha had a threatening of rheumatism. They persuaded each other, and she persuaded them both. But first they must see her off, behold Dennis on his triumphant way, bid them God speed, take a last kiss.

The programme seemed easy. It was not until the Miss Paightons arrived at Waterloo that they saw to carry it out was not only difficult, but practically impossible. For it seemed that all the world was going to S. Africa by the Minotaur. They had perhaps been prepared for waggon loads, truck loads, porters laden with luggage. They were stout hearted old ladies, and could press and dodge their ways through the confusion. But there was not only luggage, but an unprecedented, unheard-of, almost incredible crowd of people. When they had got as far as the booking office, and paused there for a moment for breath, they heard someone amongst the sea of men in which they were engulfed say:

"That's one of them. That's Strumper."

"There's Mandeville! Good old Mandeville," they shouted, and: "Three cheers for Railton!"

It was then that they became aware that it was the

cricketing team for S. Africa that were being given an ovation, and for whom a rousing send-off was being prepared. Dennis was nowhere to be seen, and it was a rough crowd, if good tempered. There is little doubt they would not have found Dennis, nor given him that careful parcel they had prepared, if Mabel had not expected them, and been on the lookout, and presently managed to extricate them from their position.

"Dennis is in the waiting-room. The representatives of the Press are there and most of the team. Lord Heron is going to make a speech. Mr. Tweed is there, too. Come along."

She shepherded them with such good will, that presently they found themselves at the door of the waiting-room, the one that led from the refreshment bar. The room was full of men, emotional men, who could hardly restrain their enthusiasm, punctuating the speech that Lord Heron was making with applause and laughter. The old maids heard that Dennis was the one man that was wanted and that 'he had always been a good sportsman.' "You can tell a man by his friends, and Dennis Passiful has all the cricket world for his friends," Lord Heron said amidst roars of applause. The old aunts found themselves quite carried away by the enthusiasm, the shouting, and the quick acquiescence in every eulogy. They found themselves with tears in their own eyes, and inclining to shout and cheer too. Their quavering voices could be heard above the tumult. Dennis, at least, certainly heard them, raising a glass of champagne, and waving it from where he stood beside Lord Heron, Mr. Tweed, the Secretary of the M.C.C., and other notable persons. He was called upon for a speech presently, and gave it modestly, saying the right things without difficulty or pause. Ursula and Agatha thought it wonderful of him to be so ready in response. "Dear boy," they murmured under their breath. He said he was "proud to

captain such a team as the M.C.C. had got together; there were many better men than himself" — shouts of "No," "No" — "who might have been chosen to go, but since it was he upon whom they had fixed he hoped to prove worthy of the honour . . ."

And then he spoke of the records of one or other of the men who were going with him, and had a word for Lord Heron and the Honourable John.

The cheers and the singing of "For he's a jolly good fellow" were still ringing in their ears when he hurried up to the old ladies. There was no time to be lost, the train was starting in ten minutes.

They never knew how they got down the platform, through that sea of men, professional cricketers, reporters, general public, photographers standing on trucks to get a view of the scene. Everywhere Dennis was recognised, cheered, shouted at, many stopping and insisting on shaking hands with him.

At last they were in the security of the reserved saloon, where Amos, entangled in rugs and cushions, was sitting in state. One of the men from Juxton's had been guarding the window, and his valet had remained until the last minute in the carriage with him.

"This is very gratifying, very gratifying indeed," Amos began, as Dennis made Mabel get in, and then stood himself by the door, still shaking hands and saying "Thank you," and "I hope so," and "Of course we shall," as the occasion demanded, not forgetting to ask two friends of his, stalwart men, who would be true to their trust, to look after the old maids, and see them into a cab.

"It's really very gratifying," Amos said, "that so many people should be here to see me off. I heard them shouting and cheering, although it was quite a long time before I realised their objective was this carriage. Perhaps I ought to say a few words?"

He looked inquiringly at Mabel, who had surrounded him with the pillows and rugs before she went on that search for the sisters. He tried to rise, as he spoke, but it was difficult to disentangle himself.

"Oh no, Father," she said hastily. She was going to tell him it was Dennis, and not himself, they had gathered to see, Dennis, and the other members of the team who were going to S. Africa to prove the pre-eminence of the Old Country, sustain its prestige. But she stopped herself in time, she saw her father was happy in his opinion:

"I should like to tell them I am gratified, highly gratified. That I hope to return with my health fully re-established. It seems ungrateful . . ."

Dennis jumped in; the train was moving. As it steamed out of the station, above the shriek of the engine, they heard:

"For he's a jolly good fellow, and so say all of we," and the exuberant three cheers.

And again Amos said it was very gratifying, very gratifying indeed.

L'ENVOI

WHAT remains to tell of the story? Much, and were I a certain distinguished and voluminous author I might venture to tell it. At thirty no man's story is told, and it were strange if Dennis Passiful proved the exception. He was always attractive to women, no less so when he came back from South Africa with his reputation as a cricketer sustained and as a leader of men enhanced. Never had there been a more popular Captain. But were I to tell more about him and his future, the story might be found to hinge upon such a little woman, such an infinitesimal and speechless specimen of her sex, that it is possible she would prove tedious to anyone less alive to her wiles and fascinations than Dennis after he had fallen under her spell.

As for Amos, his health benefited amazingly by the tour. He was included in all the honours paid to the English team of cricketers, dining with the High Commissioner in Cape Town and being entertained by the Committee of the Cricket Union at Houts Bay. He never really became aware that he was not the centre of the whole expedition. A few other people, impressed by his manner, and the speeches he contrived to make, thought so too. Mabel felt it would be a pity to undeceive him, and Dennis actually kept him up in his illusion. Dennis wanted no fuss made about himself, he was glad Amos should bear the brunt of any ceremonies. He was here to play cricket, surmount the difficulties of the matting pitch, the clear atmosphere that at first disorganised all their defence, changing distances, altering perspective, responsible for many a missed catch and shot ball. That was his job, not being dined and

wined and speechified over. His father-in-law was more than welcome to his share of all the festivities given in their honour by the hospitable Colonials.

It is perhaps worth chronicling that Amos gained nearly a stone in the three weeks he remained with the team, and when he returned to England, leaving Dennis and Mabel behind him, to finish their tour, it was Cosmo Merritt who met him, and told him at once that his name would be in the list of birthday honours, thus accentuating his impression, and making him certain for all time that he had done something for his country, whether before he went to South Africa or while he was there, may not have been quite clear to him. The only thing that was ever clear was his own importance. Cosmo could not let him doubt it; nor that it was he who had drawn attention to it in high quarters. Therefore if not this month, then next, the "Tale and the Typewriter" will be put upon the stage, and other books and plays follow that will bear this eminent name. Cosmo thinks Amos should stand for Parliament. And in that case he will need a secretary.

There is really no need for Lord Loughborough to provide for his youngest son; it is unnecessary even for Cosmo to borrow from Dolly. Cosmo spends a great deal of time with the Haverfords, nevertheless, at Thorpe and elsewhere. He is sorry for Diana, who, notwithstanding, or perhaps on account of this sympathy, bears her matrimonial burden very easily. She has taken to hunting, with something of the keenness that distinguished her mother. She dresses better than any woman of her acquaintance, and she is tolerant of her husband, who, to his credit it must be admitted, considers himself still the most fortunate of men, or almost the most fortunate. Diana's extravagance sometimes gives him an uneasy twinge, and he hates to have so often to refuse Mervyn's requests for advances. There is no doubt Cosmo is his favourite brother-in-law, even

though he sometimes suspects him of "pulling his leg," and is often in doubt as to the meaning of many of the things he says.

About Margaret Lemon. Margaret is still a favourite in the circles she adorns. Many men go to her flat, and others long for the entrée. But she is fastidious; not the less so as she advances in years. She has no mind to be otherwise, although how it is she has attained the freedom of choice, or who is responsible for the expenses of the flat, remains an agreeable mystery, frequently discussed in Clubland — but *sub rosa*, and without malice, for they are all too attached to Margaret to try seriously to probe a mystery she wishes to guard. Cosmo is often there, but then Cosmo is a poor man. There *have* been suspicions that a certain eminent publisher . . . but that of course is absurd.

Fanny put up a good fight for her man. Less dignified than Diana, she was certainly more successful. Cosmo remained her friend, and in the background of her life contrived to extract a certain amusement from watching what went on in front. The evolution of Fanny was on the lines he had anticipated when he first proposed she should become a member of that notorious social club where bridge is played, and other games also. Fanny has become an habituée of Crockford's, she may be said to live there, she is so rarely absent from the place.

At Crockford's, the low-ceilinged rooms heavy with smoke and scandal, bad air, and worse feeling, Fanny can daily be seen in her legitimate atmosphere. She has arrived before anyone else, and sits in the hall, in a corner of the sofa that commands a view of the outer door, ostensibly engaged with her tea. To watch her with her tea is to witness a curious performance. She has one cup of tea brought to her and rejects it. Either it is China, and she wants Indian, or it is Indian, and this day it is China she fancies, and she is indignant, and generally atrociously

rude to the offending waiters, who dare not show any resentment. She crumbles the teacake, finding it overdone, or underdone, and remembering she prefers muffins. Fanny always complains of the food at the Club, and the service, maddening the management. If there are any men in the lounge, she says she "wishes one could have pickles for tea." But as a rule there are no men at this hour. What she enjoys more then anything else, what in fact brings her to the Club so early, is to see three women waiting for a rubber, and to decline to make a fourth. She will go into the card-room to watch them doing nothing, perching on the Club fender, or one of the small tea-tables, hunching her back, complaining of headache, or toothache, looking like a sick monkey. Fanny is well on in her thirty-first year, but she still assumes a babyish manner. When a fourth player appears she sometimes asserts her right to cut in. She is a fretful partner or antagonist, flinging the cards on the table when she loses, saying she "would like to know for once what it feels like to be a winner." If she wins she points out to her antagonists how they could have saved the game. She is forgetful of her debts, and has frequently to be reminded. Naturally, therefore, if anyone else is available to make up a rubber, her room is preferred to her company. It is when she knows this that she becomes tenacious of her rights.

It is about five or six o'clock when Fanny's whole demeanour changes. This is the close of the business day, and now the men are coming into the Club, looking for a game, any sort of game. All at once Fanny is all smiles and amiability, willing to make up a rubber for, or with, anybody, at any points, the higher the better.

Towards seven she is confiding that her cook is out for the evening, or her man has left in a hurry. Fanny has a flat now, and her old want of success in housekeeping. She is fishing for an invitation to dinner, and is rarely un-

successful. There is no doubt that she is a favourite with the men who frequent this not very exclusive Club. And the less refined they are, the more she attracts them.

The Club atmosphere suits Fanny exactly. There are petty disputes in which she likes to intervene, and all manner of opportunities for making mischief and fomenting trouble, also of obtaining the promiscuous meals that are needed to supplement her idle housekeeping. Fanny has a small appetite and a bad digestion, but she cannot bear her own company, and is about as domestic as a jackal. She was satisfied with bridge for a long time, and an occasional game of poker. But latterly she has learned baccarat; they play that, too, sometimes at Crockford's, but surreptitiously, and without the sanction of the Committee. Last summer she went to Dieppe, and several times to Boulogne for a week-end, becoming well known in the Casinos, where she stayed from the time they opened until the "*Dernier Coup.*" But she complains very much of the people she meets in such places, finding them "impossible." She has doubts of the morality of most of the women she meets, and makes spiteful little speeches about them. No good-looking or well-dressed woman is safe from Fanny's tongue.

Fanny's income is only £800 a year. Amos has never supplemented it, nor forgiven the story that, after all, she told him about Mabel and Roddy Ainsworth. But Amos said so much about the way Mabel had looked after him in S. Africa, and how well she had been received everywhere, and about Dennis's regard for her, that Fanny had not been able to restrain herself.

Amos waited until Dennis and Mabel were home again, but even before that, Fanny found that she was no longer expected at Fitzjohn's Hall for her Sunday dinner. Fanny had been losing hold on Amos for a long time, ever since his illness in fact, when he had recalled Ted's, and even

talked it over with Dr. Lauder. Dr. Lauder was no friend of Fanny's, and made no disguise of his opinion of her. Amos's coldness to Fanny dated from then, but his complete change of front was not until she had spoken to him about Mabel. Even then he waited to hear what Dennis had to say about it before he pronounced that decree of banishment. But when once it came, it was immutable, complete, he washed his hands of her. That did not, of course, prevent her speaking of him, and in the most intimate terms, whenever she thought that his wealth, or his title, would add to her consequence. But she knew that it was useless to apply to him for assistance. He had already told her £800 a year was a very good income for a young woman who had brought nothing to the common stock!

The unfortunate fact remains, however, that on £800 a year it is only a limited amount of baccarat that can be played in foreign casinos. How does Fanny do it? That is almost as much a mystery as the source of Margaret Lemon's maintenance. Only that Fanny is so eminently respectable. Fanny clings to respectability, and challenges every other woman's right to it with uplifted brow and innuendo. Her bridge has certainly improved; it is possible, although not probable, that it pays for her baccarat.

Personally I suspect Fanny of paying nothing, not the rent of the flat, nor for her many dresses. I suspect her of being up to her neck in debt, and contemplating a second marriage when her creditors become sufficiently clamorous. There is a serious applicant in the field. It is, strangely enough, that very gentleman of whom Cosmo had once spoken to his sister as a genuine specimen of a modern Don Quixote. The aspirant to Fanny's hand has given away a considerable portion of what was once a large estate. But I suspect Fanny of the intention to marry him. There is a new casino opening at Pas de Calais or Wimereux. The man with the unworldly intelligence and

the beautiful ideals has Cosmo's encouragement and full approval. Fanny has always been a little cat, so she will assuredly fall upon her feet.

The only time Mabel has wanted to disobey her husband was when he issued his orders that there was to be no communication between her and Fanny. But Mabel was always amenable, and obeyed the order. Her father backed him up, and although neither thought it advisable to give her the real reason, she knew it had something to do with Roddy Ainsworth.

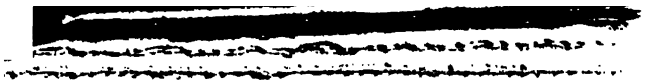
Roddy Ainsworth, however, is still a friend of the family. Roddy is married now. A very wealthy widow from Manchester fell in love with him on the first occasion the touring company of "Charles Auchester" presented itself in that intelligent town. Roddy has the command of something like £15,000 a year, together with a stout and doting spouse, and two pretty little step-daughters whom he intends to train for the stage. By the time they are ready he hopes a more reliable and fair-minded Press will have taken the place of the present venal and libellous papers. In his own handsome drawing-room, no one has ever been found to say that he sings flat!

But there is something that is driving Roddy and Fanny and everything else from Mabel's mind, something too wonderful for words, as yet almost incredible. It is in the future only, but Dr. Lauder seems very sure about it. Agatha and Ursula are already mysteriously busy upon the tiniest and most ridiculous of garments, and Dennis, kinder to her than ever, brings Wilfred Small home sometimes to talk about his own young cricketer, 'turned six months, and with a trick of his fingers already that could only belong to a bowler.'

Mabel does not want a young cricketer, but she is in a flutter and flush of almost anguished anxiety to hold a baby girl in her arms. If she dreams beyond the pungent smell of

new flannel, the unimaginable ecstasy of soft sucking lip against her breast, and snuggling cry, it is to envision th rapture of teaching a little daughter of her own and Dennis to cook like Ursula and Agatha, to sew, to keep hous and make mulberry preserve, to enter into her woman kingdom, the kingdom which Juxton's Ltd. and th Woman's Suffrage Leagues are trying so hard and s successfully to demolish.

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